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THE  
EDUCATION  
OF  
THE POETIC SPIRIT

*A Study in Children's Expression  
in the English Lesson*

By  
MARJORIE L. HOURD



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TO ALL MY CLASSES  
*From* 1931-1945



## PREFACE

THE late Dr. Susan Isaacs first encouraged me to write this book and Mrs. Volkov has nursed it ever since.

Some of the material appeared in *The New Era in Home and School* under the titles of 'Dramatisation' (June 1940) and 'The World Around the Corner' (November 1943). I am grateful to the New Education Fellowship for permission to use it here. For permission to quote from *The Perse Playbooks* I am indebted to W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., Cambridge; from *Family Reunion* and *Little Gidding*, by T. S. Eliot, to Faber and Faber Ltd.; from *Between Man and Man* by Martin Buber, to Messrs. Routledge and Kegan Paul. I am grateful also to Mrs. Frieda Lawrence for permission to quote the whole of the poem 'Snake' by D. H. Lawrence, and to Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd. and Mr. D. A. Beacock for courtesy in allowing me to use the ballad 'Singapore' from *Play-Way English for To-day* as illustrative material.

My thanks are also due to all those who from time to time have helped so generously with encouragement, suggestions, criticisms and material; and particularly to Mrs. Edna Balint, Dr. Michael Balint, Mr. John Danby, Miss Marjorie Frances, Miss Margaret Jackson, Professor W. R. Niblett, Mr. James Reeves, Mr. A. N. G. Richards and Mr. L. L. Whyte.

I owe a special debt to my friend Dr. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, who in the give and take of discussion over many years has helped me so much to clarify the ideas expressed here.

Finally I must thank Mrs. P. Puddephatt and Mrs. D. Grace for valuable secretarial help, Mrs. D. Grace for assisting in compiling the indices, and my former students, Miss J. Fookes and Miss E. Green, for the material in Appendix II.

MARJORIE L. HOURD

London, 1949

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Blest the infant Babe,  
(For with my best conjecture I would trace  
Our Being's earthly progress) blest the Babe,  
Nursed in his Mother's arms who sinks to sleep,  
Rocked on his Mother's breast who with his soul  
Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!  
For him in one dear presence there exists  
A virtue which irradiates and exalts  
Objects through widest intercourse of sense.  
No outcast he bewildered and depressed :  
Along his infant veins are interfused  
The gravitation and the filial bond  
Of nature that connect him with the world.

. . . . .

For feeling has to him imparted power  
That through the growing faculties of sense  
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind  
Create creator and receiver both  
Working but in alliance with the works  
Which it beholds.—Such unity is the first  
*Poetic Spirit* of our human life,  
By uniform control of after years,  
In most abated or suppressed ; in some,  
Through every change of growth and of decay,  
Pre-eminent till death.

WORDSWORTH, *The Prelude*, Book II, l. 233 ff.

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## INTRODUCTION

### AIM AND SCOPE OF THE THESIS

---

GOOD TEACHING has always rested upon two kinds of understanding, an appreciation of the intrinsic values of the material to be taught and a knowledge of the nature of children. But this reconciliation of child and grown-up values is not always achieved in educational practice. At one time the accent was more on the adult's standard, but to-day we are experiencing a movement towards the child-centred school. Two main factors account for the swing of the pendulum: the rapid advance of psychological theory in relation to child development and the desire of a revolutionary society to liberate itself from hide-bound classical traditions. But in spite of these tendencies it is difficult to find in the majority of schools to-day a settled faith in any direction.

It is so easy to become infected with the prevailing educational jargon without an assimilation of the fundamental philosophy which gave rise to it. For example, much work goes on in some quarters under the banner of 'activity methods' which fails to reach the essential needs of individual children, whilst often in the service of the 'interest' much distortion of intrinsic values takes place. Blake's tiger stands in danger of losing its symbolic power to become part of a project centred on the jungle! The younger child is often compelled to live in a world of postmen and steam engines, 'as though his whole vocation were endless imitation'; and the older boy or girl may similarly be driven into a study of coal and transport. This is not intended as an out-of-hand attack on 'the centre of interest' method of teaching, which has done so much to eliminate dead formalism and to seek for a principle of integration within the curriculum. It is however a challenge to educationists to think what they are doing and not to accept child nature as determined by a method which can so soon become stereotyped, and not to sacrifice too easily the standards inherent in the often despised 'subjects'. It is true that the breaking-down of the subject barriers has helped to reveal the inter-relatedness of knowledge, and this has been a

progressive move of the utmost importance. But there is a danger that the method may obscure its purpose, which was to discover and not to predict children's interests.

This was the dilemma for education which Professor Dewey foresaw in his essay on *The Child and the Curriculum*<sup>1</sup> as far back as 1906. He realised the dangers of the pendulum swing but he also saw the way of balance and equilibrium. The child and the curriculum, he affirmed, were not opposed, they were parts of the same process, the process of growth. Knowledge should be 'psychologised', and by this he meant kneaded and made digestible in the forms in which a child could take it as his own.<sup>2</sup> This was the teacher's job: to discover how his subject could become part of child experience. 'He is not concerned,' Dewey wrote, 'with the subject matter as such, but with the subject matter as a related factor in a total and growing experience. Thus to see it is to psychologise it.'<sup>3</sup> This book is concerned with just that process as it applies in the English lesson. It is not based upon any belief that English is far more important than History or Science or any other subject; but rather upon the assumption that every subject has its own particular contribution to make towards nourishment, which is another name for education.

Many of the new educationists are dubious about the value of literature as a subject in the curriculum. They point to recent investigations into children's reading,<sup>4</sup> and argue that these prove that the standards of children's own reading when they are left to themselves are so different from those put forward in the literature lesson that we must change our syllabuses to bring them more in line with these tastes—a mistaken view. Have we not always been aware of two kinds of reading done by school children; of the book that went into the desk when the teacher came into the room, and the book that came out of it ready for the lesson? But because a child enjoys a school-boy thriller, it does not follow that he is deaf to the exploits of Achilles. However, he must meet Achilles on his own level. Achilles, in Dewey's phrase, must be 'psychologised'. He is

<sup>1</sup> In *The School and the Child*, pp. 17-47.

<sup>2</sup> 'Subject matter is but spiritual food, possible nutritive material. It cannot digest itself; it cannot of its own accord turn into bone and muscle and blood,' *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *What do Boys and Girls Read?* by A. J. Jenkinson. 1940.

## INTRODUCTION

not sacrificed for Sexton Blake—both move along together.<sup>5</sup> But the teacher casts in his lot with Achilles. Nor does this mean that the child is expected to bow the knee before the hallowed masterpiece. The girl who after a month's reading of an adaptation of *The Iliad* suddenly asked, 'Isn't this a marvelous story! Who wrote it?' had recognised the quality of genius without any clap-trap about great writers. She had come to this view because she had begun to dramatise the story and was slowly assimilating the heroic qualities of the characters.

But the argument is not left here. The objection is further made that after years of this bi-reading habit the children leave school never to open Homer and Shakespeare again. That may be, and there are two answers to it. In the first place the aim of the literature lesson, though it may be ultimately to inculcate a standard of literary taste, is, to begin with, to provide a means towards a fuller development of personality—a means, again, of growth. Nor is it possible to say where and how this takes place. In the English lesson, perhaps more than in any other, it is necessary to cast one's bread upon the waters. But it must be bread and not chaff in which there is no nourishment. And ten to one we shall not recognise the bread's return; for

Who that shall point as with a wand and say,  
'This portion of the river of my mind  
Came from yon fountain?'<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the joy in a poem showed itself later in the beauty of a piece of embroidery, or less specifically even in a richer response to life. These influences are beyond our statistical analysis; they are not beyond our understanding. They are part of the whole which is different from the sum of the parts. In the second place, the answer to these objections lies in the new Education Bill which has envisaged a prolonged period of education leading from school into adult life. Time is not on our side if we imagine the influence of literature ceasing to operate at the age of fifteen or sixteen. But if we can picture education as a process lasting into adult life, then the standards we uphold in the English lesson have more chance to win their

<sup>5</sup> This view is supported in Mr. Jenkinson's investigation. (See footnote 4.)—'Teachers and adults generally must not assume that poor reading drives out good reading. Books of widely varying quality can be read side by side, each performing some function.' pp. 281, 282.

<sup>6</sup> *The Prelude*, by William Wordsworth (Oxford Edition). Bk. II, ll. 208-210.



day. Let us waste no more time bemoaning the trash which children and grown-ups read, but turn our minds instead to the appreciation of the intellectual and emotional grip which they have when they are given something to grasp.

This story of growth through literature is told in these chapters largely by the children themselves in what they said and did and wrote. It was of course the job of the teacher to understand their needs and to select the syllabus accordingly. I do not claim that there is anything new or extraordinary in any of this material. Many teachers of English are doubtless receiving similar or more significant pieces of expression every day. Nor did I collect it with any determined purpose in view. I am working upon a selection from the manna that fell into my hands more or less haphazardly over a period of twelve years teaching in the same school. In any case one is limited in making collections of this kind by the child's natural desire to retain his compositions. One steals or begs where one can. It is only because my career in this school is ended that I feel a compulsion to take stock of what I have gained. Otherwise I should no doubt be content to sit in the wilderness of chaotic theories waiting for more and more evidence to fall into my lap. The plan of this thesis therefore is to some extent moulded to the material and by the desire to discuss only what I could vouch for, and what was the direct outcome of my own teaching method.

The School from which the material was gained was one of the High Schools of the Girls' Public Day School Trust. It was so situated that it drew upon a mixed social environment and represented a very wide range of intelligence.<sup>7</sup> In short, it was an unselective High School of the old type. This group of Schools shares in many ways a common tradition of culture, yet nevertheless each one varies in the way in which this is translated into terms of discipline and teaching method. The atmosphere of freedom in this particular school and the friendly relationship between the staff and the children contributed very largely towards the attitude which the children as a whole took to expression of every kind.

There is one way in which the findings in these chapters present a limited view, they only refer to girls. I have fre-

<sup>7</sup> A graph showing this extremely wide range of ability is given in an account of an investigation made by Mrs. Marion Milner into various aspects of the life and work of these schools. See *The Human Problem in Schools*, p. 66.

## INTRODUCTION

quently discussed this material with teachers in boys' schools and although many possible differences have been pointed out, yet the main development aspects have been accepted as common to both sexes.<sup>8</sup> The general opinion seems to be that boys are more inclined to be afraid of letting themselves go emotionally, and that the adolescent boy especially would more readily turn to imitation and less readily accept free forms of expression.<sup>9</sup> My own experience of teaching for short periods and observing students for many years in mixed schools has not led me entirely to endorse this view. There is the masculine component in every girl, and the feminine in every boy; a full and free expression should capture this differential pattern. It is a very interesting problem and one which deserves more careful investigation on a fundamental psychological basis.<sup>10</sup> However in order to avoid confusion, I have used the feminine pronoun for the child as soon as I begin to refer to my own classes, until the final section when reference is more universal.

A more serious objection to the limited reference of this material, however, is likely to be made on the grounds of its Grammar School origin; that, in other words, such expression could only be obtained from schools where the children's intelligence is above the average; where they come from a fairly cultured background and where the classes are small. I shall discuss at some length the relation between expression and intelligence in a later chapter;<sup>11</sup> but whereas I agree that environmental factors influence children's verbal expression a great deal, I am nevertheless convinced that free writing of a poetic kind can come from children drawn from a poor district in schools where the classes are large, if the teacher knows what she is doing. To lend support to this belief I have in an

<sup>8</sup> A. J. Jenkinson in the investigation into children's reading already referred to (footnote 4) concludes that the reading tastes of boys and girls are broadly similar, p. 269. He writes: 'Age is a weightier differentiator than sex. The development of young adolescents as human beings goes on together with their development as boys and girls; both sorts of development are important, but the factors common to both sexes as human beings are more important in the growth of taste than are the factors which distinguish the sexes.' p. 269.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Nine, p. 91, footnote 5.

<sup>10</sup> The Consultative Committee in its *Report on the Differentiation of the Curriculum for Boys and Girls respectively in Secondary Schools* remarks on the absence of such research as far back as 1923; and little seems to have been done about it since. See Jenkinson again, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Fourteen, p. 161 ff.

appendix<sup>12</sup> given an account of some work done in one lesson by a student under my supervision in a school of the type just described. Nevertheless there is a regrettable tendency in some quarters at the present time to begrudge what is done for intelligent and gifted children because the problem of backwardness looms so large; or else to assume that there is no problem connected with them. Intelligence is one of the nation's greatest assets; imagination her chiefest glory;—but like everything else they must have their food. Let us not in reacting against an over-emphasis upon academic attainment neglect the study of what can be achieved from our best material. Not that all the children who feature here were highly gifted by any means; but some of them were.

I have not throughout this book made any attempt to interpret expression as a diagnosis of neurotic manifestations though its function in clinical psycho-therapy is well known. The fear of revealing themselves in outward forms may easily be to some children as strong a retarding factor in linguistic development as a low intelligence is to others. But a full investigation of the subject lies outside this study. However, I have tried to show how mental health is maintained through the teacher's skill in leaving the way open between feeling and expression, and indeed how children seek for themselves this therapy which lies in acting, speaking and writing.

The book falls into four parts. The first part deals with the process of 'psychologising' literature, which in the young child most readily takes the form of dramatisation. The adolescent response to the dramatic method is drawn into line with this earlier development in Chapter Six. The method in this section is mainly empirical and the classroom situations are closely followed. The chapter headings describe kinds and methods of dramatisation, and not until the end is any full attempt made to place the child's work in relation to adult forms and standards.

In Section Two the scheme is reversed. Although it begins with a consideration of the young child's verse compositions, it is mainly concerned with adolescent work. Also, instead of following the child's expression along the lines of his development, it begins with the finished written compositions, and an analysis is made of these not only from the development angle but in the light of certain aesthetic theories on Imagination,

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix II.

## INTRODUCTION

Imitation and Suggestion. Then a further attempt is made to reconcile the theories of the literary critics with the findings of the psychologists.

When I began to teach these children, like most teachers I did not set out with a psychological theory to prove or an educational philosophy to put to the test. It was only gradually that I realised that my findings were in line with many of those of Dr. Susan Isaacs, Piaget, and the Gestalt School, to mention a few of the most outstanding sources of agreement. However, one's teaching is bound to be influenced by one's own personal philosophy and beliefs. There is little doubt that these found their origin, as far as I was concerned as a teacher, more in the poetry and doctrines of Wordsworth than in any other single writer or educationist, and the passage quoted at the beginning of this book is a fairly close summary of its main argument. But whatever the philosophy by which one is influenced, teaching remains a highly individual art. Though hundreds of teachers are working with similar techniques every teacher will make his own peculiar use of them. Moreover, there can be no education of any value unless a relationship is set up between teacher and child, and it is this relationship which in the last analysis determines the quality of the teaching which results. These are the topics dealt with in Sections Three and Four: the nature of this relationship as it affects child expression, the technique which best serves creative energy, and the underlying psychological and philosophical theories to which this evidence has pointed.

Dewey, in the essay already quoted,<sup>13</sup> points out the importance of adult values and the forms produced by the artist as a means of evaluating children's work. We need, he says, Rafael and Corot to value the impulses of a child when he draws and daubs. In this book we have needed Shakespeare, Keats and Coleridge amongst others to appreciate the child's drama and composition. He may read trash when he is alone, but when he becomes creative in the presence of creators only the highest standards are appropriate to his efforts. For the greater ease of the reader, the passages from the poets and critics which have been most closely woven into the fabric of the argument are re-printed in an Appendix.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Appendix I.

## THE EDUCATION OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

Educational literature to-day, with a few rare exceptions,<sup>15</sup> seems to move in one of three directions: towards the enunciation of abstract philosophies, towards the records of experiments and statistical research, and towards descriptions of specified techniques such as the project method. This book has tried to combine something of all three approaches, though it cannot at any point claim to be a controlled scientific experiment. I am aware that I am moving in a No Man's Land of empirical theory and that my findings are only tentative. Enough if they provoke corroboration and dissent and further explorations into what is after all the comparatively unexplored territory of children's expression. There is, I believe, room for many more attempts to move in this in-between world of theory and practice and to devise approaches to education which will give the teacher lines of attack as well as the deepest reason for making it. I believe we should try to avoid the purely philosophical and theoretical approach which is out of touch with classroom situations as strenuously as we shun the tips-for-teachers one; whilst it is necessary to examine the statistical experimental approach, to make sure that these researches are not guilty of obeying that

false secondary power  
By which we multiply distinctions, then  
Deem that our puny boundaries are things  
That we perceive, and not that we have made.<sup>16</sup>

And yet it is the right employment of controlled experimental method which will act as a corrective to the type of research in this thesis. Further, I believe that we are more likely to reach fundamental principles by learning the right technique than we are to reach a good technique from the formulation of abstract principles. For example, I have known many students come to appreciate ballads as literature for the first time by watching children act them and by practising the technique described in Chapter Two of this book. What is important is that the technique be based on sound psychological principles and that these be understood by the teacher. The teacher who works entirely by intuition, knowing not what he does nor

<sup>15</sup> Among these I would place the contributions of Dr. Susan Isaacs, particularly *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, 1930, and *Social Development in Young Children*, 1933; and Mr. Herbert Read, *Education through Art*, 1943.

<sup>16</sup> *The Prelude*, Book II, ll. 216-220.

## INTRODUCTION

why, is as much a potential menace as the one who always knows the theoretical why but who lacks the touch that makes the situation whole and alive.

The technique of knowing and yet appearing not to know, of consciousness in unconsciousness, action in non-action, is the one recommended in this book. It is extremely difficult to describe, for although it is not a mystical idea but one which has its scientific and genetic basis, as we shall see, yet it is completely bound up with the child's and the teacher's whole response to life. But the complexity of the task is no reason for not making the attempt. It is becoming more and more obvious in the world to-day that those philosophies—social, political, and educational—whose dialectics are more rigidly controlled and therefore more easily defined, are gaining over those which are more dynamic and fluid and for this reason escape formulation. These latter, if we who are in the middle free way are not more articulate in our awareness, may even be doomed to extinction and lose any controlling force. Such may be the fate of democracy. Educationally a philosophy which is truly liberating to the creative capacities of the individual may lose its influence because of the more easily gained clarity of fixed and determinate methods. This book is an attempt to rescue for education, albeit in a narrow field, that of the English lesson, this creative power which Wordsworth has called the 'poetic spirit'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Since going to press I have come into contact with the work of F. Matthias Alexander and I believe that some of the findings in the following chapters in the psycho-aesthetic field are in line with several of his fundamental tenets in the psycho-physical sphere and especially his contention that the use of a direct method to gain a pre-determined end—such as changing the manner of the use of the self—deprives the individual of that freedom in thought and action essential in restoring the integrated working of the organism—a freedom which can be gained however by putting into practice an indirect method of control based upon means rather than upon ends. The books in which he has described this method demonstrate the difficulty which he has found in formulating in words the amazing dynamic subtlety of his technique. He writes: "It is comparatively simple to express some idea or experience in a short sentence or in several short sentences if the idea or experience represents something specific or something that can be done or gained by the *direct method*, for this involves the concept of separation and disconnectedness. But ideas or experiences concerned with unified phenomena, and which involve the *indirect method* for general, instead of specific application can only be fully expressed by a sentence that conveys the meaning of such ideas and experiences so that there can be no doubt that the concept on which they are based is that of a co-ordinated indivisible whole." *The Universal Constant in Living*, p. xxvi.



*Section One*

DRAMATISATION

- A Study of the Development of Children  
through Dramatisation; particularly  
of the Junior School Child



Nor is it I who play the part,  
But a shy spirit in my heart,  
That comes and goes—will sometimes leap  
From hiding-places ten years deep;  
Or haunts me with familiar face,  
Returning, like a ghost unladen,  
Until the debt I owe be paid.

WORDSWORTH, *The Waggoner*, ll. 209–215

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EARLY GROWTH OF DRAMATISATION

---

I HAVE SPOKEN of the importance of discovering the nature of the child's needs before we begin to select material with which to satisfy them. Curiosity is the urge which has claimed most attention from educationists and certainly without it the child would not progress very far in knowledge. But we are apt to forget that his questions will relate to himself as well as to the outside world. In his growth from birth to maturity a person has to ask himself three important questions which correspond in a broad sense to the three chief stages of development. First he asks in early childhood: 'Who am I?' and he makes the assertion in as many ways as possible: 'I am myself'. Then he explores more fully his relationship with other people and through sympathy as well as rivalry reaches a degree of reciprocity. This is his main task in later childhood. Thirdly he explores further his own uniqueness and asks: 'What kind of a person am I?' This is the question of adolescence. I am not suggesting that after that the child thoroughly understands his own personality, for this is a life-time pursuit.

It is the purpose of this Section to watch this understanding grow through the process of dramatisation of various kinds: dramatic play, miming, play-writing, and play-acting. Most of my material is taken from the work of Junior School children, which is a time when the dramatic impulse is strongest and when it is the most valuable means of securing the child's expression; though it is necessary to study the form it takes before that in the dramatic play of the Pre-school and Infant School child, and later the shape it assumes for the adolescent.

It is hoped that this study will throw new light upon the educational value of these activities. Herbert Read in his *Education through Art* stressed the fact that the aim of Art teaching was to provide 'better persons and better societies' rather than more works of art.<sup>1</sup> I believe that the same principle should hold for Drama. The spontaneous feeling of the child

<sup>1</sup> Page 60.

is more important than perfected technique. But a greater degree of reform has taken place in this direction in the teaching of the visual arts than has yet been put into practice in dramatic art.<sup>2</sup>

*I. Phantasy Dramatic Play: Children Under Seven  
Identification: 'I Am Myself'*

One of the best ways of understanding a young child is to watch him at play. This statement would be accepted with all its implications by everyone who regards children with what Dr. Susan Isaacs has called 'an educated perception'. Let us imagine we are in a modern Nursery School watching the play of the children under five. The following picture was, in fact, one which I gained from a particular morning's observation.

The children are out of doors with the usual equipment of sand-pit, jungle-gym, slide, cosy-places, and so on. The scene at first presents a confused spectacle of children running, screaming, fighting, laughing; in short, 'playing'. Gradually the picture slows down, or rather our captured attention makes it seem so. In one corner there is a group of boys of four. Three of them have climbed behind a wooden fence. They are armed with branches, the thick stem uppermost, and they are beating off the attackers, who, though at first weaponless, soon send a child in search of branches equal in size to those of their enemy. There is much stamping and shouting; and a monotonous war cry of 'Bang-Crash-Fire-Bang-Shoot' is continued for some time, until it is taken up in other corners of the garden by children quite differently engaged, patting sand into buckets, building castles. This is carried on for nearly ten minutes until the attackers are beaten off. The conquerors, now holding their branches with the leaves uppermost, walk round the garden repeating triumphal ditties. The attackers join in at the end. They have found a more satisfying role.

In another corner quite a different drama is taking place.

<sup>2</sup> There is, for example, nothing comparable in this sphere to the work of Professor Cizek and Miss Marion Richardson in children's art. See *Child Art and Frank Cizek*, Wilhelm Viola; and *Children as Artists*, R. R. Tomlinson (King Penguin Books). However, there is a book about to be published by the National under Fourteens Council as this study goes to press, written by Mrs. E. M. Langdon, *Dramatic Work for Children from Five to Fourteen*, which is as far as I know the first attempt in this country to relate the concrete technique of dramatic work to fundamental psychological principles.

There is mother, father and the baby. Father is giving orders before he leaves for the office. Mother then leaves the baby while she goes out shopping, but she puts the cabbage on to cook first. She meets the conquering army as she pays a visit to the butcher's; and one of the soldiers (who is obviously aware of other play than his own) speaks to her in passing: 'Your cabbage is boiling over and your baby is crying.' The good wife exclaims: 'Oh, deary me! I must hurry home.' In other parts of the garden children are riding motor cars and tricycles—they are running up and down the slide. A three-year-old has climbed to the top of the jungle-gym for the first time. He is surveying the moving scene with proud detachment. And so it goes on. A constantly changing pattern; and the observer is aware of an intense inner life being externalised in these play activities. He is prompted to enquire what it is that causes children to express themselves thus: to wrap themselves in phantasies, to imitate the people about them, to reflect so frequently primitive modes of behaviour. It is imitation, pugnacity, self-assertion, and so on; but it is deeper than this. Play serves a physical and a social end; it develops the child's body muscles and he needs other children for its happy fulfilment; but it goes deeper than this. He is also expressing an individual psychology; his own conflicts; his own perceptions; his own incipient reasoning. When he is building with bricks, we do not know merely by watching him what deep desire is being satisfied by the towering summits of his castle.

We might describe this period for the purpose of the present study as one of identification. The child at this age identifies things with people (it is a Mother stick and a Father stick), and people with himself. It seems as though it is not until this identification with objects and people has taken place that the child is able to sever himself from them. Not until he has comprehended them in his own inner context is he able to place them in the world of outer contexts. Yet the normal child is never so absorbed in a phantasy that he cannot realise the impact of the outside world. On the other hand external reality is a continual source of symbols for the expression of ideas too overwhelming to comprehend otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

This is where dramatisation comes in. It is one of the means

<sup>3</sup> See *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, by Susan Isaacs: 'The first value which the physical world has for the child is as a canvas upon which to project his personal wishes and anxieties, and his first form of interest in it is one of dramatic representation.' p. 101.

by which the child gradually learns to isolate himself. It is a means, not an end in itself. For the child under five there is no audience, no playwright and no producer: only a player. His contact with his material is direct and intimate. He says to himself, 'I am a king' or 'I am Cinderella' or 'I am Mummy'; and he says this because his chief concern is 'I am myself'. He can only know himself to be finally separated from his mother as he grows in understanding of the reality and separate existence of other things and people. But in these early years he lives in the shadow of the womb; and all his experimentation must be on the basis of the assurance, 'to this I can return'. Dramatisation is at once the means by which he ventures out into the characters and lives of others, and the means by which he draws these back as symbols into the person of himself.

## *II. Weaning From Early Phantasy*

If, then, the child of five is unable in his dramatic play to separate his own needs from the character he is imitating, we must not expect the child of six or even eight, because he has entered the Infant School, suddenly to be capable of acting plays, written by somebody else and imposed upon him by the teacher. These years should be regarded as a kind of weaning period, a weaning from phantasy. The normal child of seven or eight is becoming sure of his identity; he has learnt to isolate himself from the world around, and group rivalry develops. He is becoming aware of other children doing things better than himself, of his own superior achievement, and self-criticism develops. But all this is a very slow and steady transition and much will depend upon the intelligence and emotional stability of the child as to whether he is capable of this detachment. For just as we introduce the baby gradually to solid food with frequent recourse to the breast, so we should only gradually try to wean him from the fairy tale and his early phantasy life. He should be allowed a continued period of full dramatic play in which he can reach the solid things of the external world without feeling that we want to deprive him of his phantasy protection before he himself finds it unnecessary. The centre-of-interest activity can satisfy this transitional stage very well, provided that the learning aspect is not over-stressed. The child takes part, for example, in a shop activity where he can engage in phantasy and play and yet learn how things are made and

sold, how people live, not by any magical powers but by the work of their own hands.

Experiments are being made in many Primary Schools to provide for these children between five and seven this extension of dramatic play. The children sometimes go straight into their play-rooms when they arrive at school in the morning, and there each child follows his own inclination and interest either alone or in a group for one or two periods on the time-table. In the lessons which follow, a tranquillity and concentration usually settles on the school of an entirely different quality from that which is obtained by externally imposed discipline. In some schools the period of play is extended or occurs at a different time. This seems to me to be the best way of dealing with this weaning period. If more schools were able to accept such a plan I believe that children would out-grow their phantasy much more safely than they usually do, and that we should not be presented with the regressive picture of classes in the Modern Secondary Schools which still crave for the fairy-tale and are satisfied with villainy vanquished and virtue victorious in its most primitive and simple form. It is true that the adolescent can rarely face the sad ending and the stark reality which the Junior School child takes so readily: but his phantasy needs should assume another shape. New conquests of reality have to be made, but from a vantage point of territory already gained. For although much of the repressed conflict of early childhood has to be lived through again in adolescence, it would be more easily resolved if at the early stage the child had been able to find his primitive assertions acceptable to the grown-up world around him, and his best means of projecting these at this time is through phantasy play.

### *III. Imaginative Sympathy: 'Myself and Other People'*

The child, then, develops by out-growing his phantasy, but also by repressing it. At the age of eight he will appear as a sensible reasoning person almost disconcerting in his matter-of-factness, and yet the force of his repressed emotions is there latent within him<sup>4</sup> waiting for the spark of adolescence to set it free again. But it is precisely because of this repression that these years are so fruitful for learning. It is because there is this stillness in his emotional life that he is the better able to

<sup>4</sup> This was Freud's reason for calling this the latency period of childhood.

reflect the myriad aspects of men and things: the great stories of literature and history, the love and hate of heroes and heroines, the adventures of great discoverers, the extent and variety of the earth's pattern, the origin and behaviour of living organisms: it can all be met with a curiosity which is now much less ego-centric. The stage of pure identification is over, and yet as we shall see a great deal remains. But the child will not be compelled to be Cinderella or Jack-the-Giant-Killer only because he is representing his own humility or his own assertion; instead, he also looks upon the characters he meets in books with *imaginative sympathy*. He can reach out towards many different kinds of people and analyse their motives; although when it comes to choosing a part in a play he will probably be drawn instinctively from these repressed unconscious levels to choose one where an identification does exist.

#### IV. Choice of Material

At the age of eight or nine children are ready to explore the world of books and they need a great deal of material. What stories shall we put before them? It is a great pity to give them too many domestic tales like *Little Women*, stories from Dickens, and so on. They are excellent books for them to read at leisure, to take down from the library shelves; they are not the best choice for class-room study and for a basis to dramatisation. Let us have instead the stories of great heroes: King Arthur, Lancelot, Gawayne, St. George, Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, Havelock the Dane, Beowulf, Sigurd, Achilles, Odysseus. They are legion. Men and women who have dared greatly and loved greatly; who went through great trials and yet who always seemed to be ultimately victorious. It is not the escape motive which leads children to these stories. To them it is reality. They feel themselves to be 'on top'. There is a great sense of power and possibility at this age, before the doubts of adolescence begin to wear it down. They have, as it were, reached one pinnacle of development and they do not yet see the much higher peaks they have to attain. What these men have done they feel they could do. To them they are great power signs, and should sail across their skies like 'huge cloudy symbols of a high romance'. There is such a wealth of heroic legend for this age that I wonder if we have any right to deprive children of it.

This is also a period when the love motives and idealisations

of mediaeval chivalry have power to soften and enrich the imagination of the child, whereas earlier they are not understood, and later they may become embarrassing. I have found that the situation between King Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere is usually accepted without comment. But one year a child asked me directly:

‘Did Guinevere love Lancelot?’

I replied ‘Yes’.

She went on: ‘But wasn’t it wrong because Arthur was her husband?’

I paused slightly to find a satisfactory answer but, as so often happens, another child gave it.

‘She loved Arthur as well, Betty, only she loved him differently.’

Betty was satisfied and so was I!

These, then, are the years for Epic and Romance, for

The tales that charm away the wakeful night  
In Araby, romances; legends penned  
For solace by dim light of monkish lamps;  
Fictions for ladies of their love, devised  
By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun  
By the dismantled warrior in old age,  
Out of the bowels of those very schemes  
In which his youth did first extravagates;  
These spread like day, and something in the shape  
Of these will live ’til man shall be no more.  
Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites are ours,  
And they must have their food. Our childhood sits,  
Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne  
That hath more power than all the elements.<sup>5</sup>

One fact certainly seems clear: that most of the pretty-pretty flimsy phantasies often written for the child do not meet his psychological needs, though they may amuse him for a time. This is a time in his mental development when he needs strong food to digest, when the sickly presentation of fairies with gauzy wings, which he knows do not live at the bottom of his garden, are an insult to the vitality and power of his imagination. The rawness of the old stories and most ballad literature is something he can enjoy on a deeper level. The jealousy between two sisters:

<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book V, l. 496.



The youngest stood upon a stane,  
The eldest cam' and pushed her in.<sup>6</sup>

The absolute standard of good and bad, of heaven and hell:

'O what hills are yon, yon pleasant hills,  
That the sun shines sweetly on?'  
'O yon are the hills o' Heaven,' he said,  
'Where you will never won.'

'O whaten-a mountain is yon,' she said,  
'Sae dreary wi' frost and snow?'  
'O yon is the mountain o' Hell,' he said,  
'Where you and I will go.'

The strong appeal which the ballad makes to children of eight and over deserves our careful analysis. There is first of all this response, partly on an unconscious level, to the emotional conflict and the violent situations which most of the old traditional ballads set forth. Secondly the simple metre, with its many subtle variations, satisfies a natural rhythmic impulse. But the appeal of which children are most aware lies in the 'sheer' use of words and phrases. There are no explanations, no pauses for description; the vocabulary is freshly minted and often neologistic, as a child's is; and yet its power is tremendous, for each word holds more than itself and much is meant that is never expressed between the lines and verses. When children merely read these poems or hear them read they respond to a story, a language, and a rhythm so far, but they will not be likely to reach the deeper levels of meaning which lie in the combination of these poetic forces. It is through the process of dramatisation that this inner purpose can best be discovered, though not through the methods most commonly used. For this reason I have devoted the next chapter to a description of the method which I have found most helpful in calling forth the imaginative sympathy of the child and at the same time preserving the beauty of this literature as a swift poignant experience full of dramatic power.

<sup>6</sup> From *Binnorie*.

<sup>7</sup> From *The Demon Lover*.

The ballads quoted in this and the next chapter are taken from the text printed in *Ballads and Ballad Poems*, selected and edited by Guy N. Pocock. (Dent, King's Treasuries, 1941.) This was the edition used by the class.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BALLAD MIME

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I HAVE observed in many schools of different kinds that the ballad lesson frequently proceeds something like this. The ballad is read round the class, explained and analysed. One lesson goes on this. Then in the next lesson, probably several days later, the teacher continues her plan: 'Now we are going to act this story. Let us think how many scenes we shall have.' (Ten minutes discussion perhaps goes on that.) 'Now what characters will there be? Take your books and let us make a list of the characters in the poem.' (Possibly half an hour goes here with all the paraphernalia needed for such a task.) Then there is the choosing of the characters, and the teacher exclaims, 'There is the bell, we will act this ballad next time.' All the dim ideas, the dawning appreciation, the first associations evoked by the poem have gone. It is not easy to recover them. I suggest that for these first experiments with poetical material a different method should be adopted which will put the child into direct contact with the meaning of the ballad.

Let us take *Sir Patrick Spens*<sup>1</sup> for illustration. The poem is first read through with that quiet enthusiasm necessary to the reading of all poetry. (Once the ballad is understood it is possible for a child to take on the reading, if there is one in the class who reads well enough. There often is.) The right reading of such a poem will usually be followed by a few moments' complete silence, then a sudden outbreak, 'Let's act it.' This is the point at which to begin as soon as possible. A child is quickly chosen to set the first scene. It takes only a few seconds to put a chair for the throne on the platform. The king is chosen, then 'the eldern knight', then a few courtiers. No discussions yet. The teacher begins to read the ballad, and as she reads the children mime what the words suggest:

The King sits in Dumfermline town,  
Drinking the blude-red wine;

<sup>1</sup> *Ballads and Ballad Poems*, p. 55.

They raise their hands to their mouths. On the second or third reading, when the ballad is familiar, a regular carousel develops in the space of two lines. But at first only the main shape can be sketched in. The king has a sudden idea. He addresses his knights in mime to the words:

O where will I get a skeely skipper  
To sail this new ship o' mine?

The crafty 'eldern knight' replies by gesture, and with a wealth of meaning in the sneer of his lips:

Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor  
That ever sailed the sea.

The king writes a letter to Sir Patrick. Generally one of the audience realises that a messenger is needed and steps forth. Then the scene shifter by snatching away a chair has a sea-shore scene prepared. Sir Patrick Spens is now chosen. The simplest gestures suggest the scene. Sir Patrick shades his eyes and looks across the sea. Sometimes, anachronistically, he has a telescope. Always the imagination of the child produces the gesture; the gestures colour the scene. The classroom ceases to exist as such as quickly as the apron stage of the Elizabethans dissolved into the rocky coast of Illyria. In many ways the method I am trying to describe is like the film technique, or one could compare it in another way to the opening of a Chinese picture roll. The mind is never allowed to draw down a curtain. The pace of the story, the vividness of the character delineation, does not permit it.

Once the technique is learnt the ballad can be acted again and again with different children and more and more meaning is drawn out of the lines. The members of the audience act as critics and give suggestions all the time as long as they do not impede the action. Generally without any prompting they provide the noises off, for the storm, the lashing of the waves and the howling of the wind. Sometimes the verse describing the sinking of the ship has caused a little difficulty, for it sinks in four lines and how dramatically!

O laith, laith were our gude Scots lords  
To wet their cork-heel'd shoon;  
But lang or a' the play was played  
They wat their hats aboon.

## THE BALLAD MIME

It may be necessary to read the verse several times until the meaning dawns. These precious lords are trying to save their fine shoes from the flowing water, but before long their hats are in danger. Generally one child leaps to the meaning first. She begins to sink slowly with knees sagging. Then she prompts the rest and drags them down with her, until one has an impressive picture of a body-strewn deck, and complete silence. Occasionally children refuse to be drowned. If one notices that they are unhappy about the ending I think that they should be allowed to invent a happy one and direct the new version of the play. Children do not demand the happy ending as a rule at this age. In reading the King Lear story adapted from the chronicles I have discussed Shakespeare's treatment of the plot, and when I have asked which version they prefer I have found a class very equally divided. They do not find it very easy to express their reasons and the kinds of answers which I received were: 'It sounds as though it couldn't be a happy story'; or, 'I don't know why, but I feel it would sound better'. These stirrings of critical judgment do show how ready such children are to read some of the great tragic ballads as well as the humorous ones and the Robin Hood stories. I believe that they are aware of the beauty of the pathos which clings to the verse like the dusty bloom on a ripened plum. It is a pathos which springs inevitably from the bald realism of the story, and it is not superimposed as it is in so many modern ballads.

It is this spontaneous and direct treatment of the ballad theme in mime which develops the meaning of it in the mind of the child. I have proved this several times in *The Wife of Usher's Well*.<sup>2</sup> I once heard this ballad taught as follows: The ballad was read round the class verse by verse, some children stumbling badly over the archaic words. Then questions began.

TEACHER: *Mary, tell me what the wife meant when she said*

*I wish the wind may never cease,  
Nor fishes in the flood,  
Till my three sons come hame to me  
In earthly flesh and blood!*

The response was a puzzled blank. The question was repeated, the verse re-read.

MARY: *I don't know what she meant.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ballads and Ballad Poems*, p. 32.

Nobody knew. The teacher embarked on an explanation in the course of which she found that she did not know either. Nothing daunted, however, she went on:

*What does the writer mean when he says that the birch of which the hats were made came from Paradise? You tell me, Joan.*

JOAN: *I don't know.*

TEACHER: *Can you tell me, Barbara?*

BARBARA: *No.*

TEACHER: *Well, if you don't know that you haven't understood the poem.*

BARBARA: *I don't understand it.*

VOICE FROM THE BACK: *It's a silly poem.*

ANOTHER VOICE: *How can a hat be made of birch?*

YET ANOTHER: *Let's read something else.*

The class disintegrates. The teacher finds that her lesson has gone. And why? Because she put words and explanations before meaning and appreciation. The children's rebellion was a protest against her method.<sup>3</sup>

Now let us apply the method already indicated. The scene is laid, the characters are chosen. The widow packs off her three stalwart sons to sea. She hears that they have set sail. She hears that they are drowned. Then comes the verse: 'I wish the wind may never cease . . .' and as the verse is read, the child in her miming begins to mix anger and despair with her sorrow. She has understood. Then one day the three sons come back,

And their hats were of the birk

It neither grew in dyke nor ditch,  
Nor yet in any sheugh,  
But at the gates o' Paradise  
That birk grew fair enough.

<sup>3</sup> I was interested to read a similar experience described by Miss Marjorie Hammond in an article on the Gestalt theory, published in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. II, part ii, June 1932: *Gestalt theories: Its significance for Teaching*. She writes, 'Recently the writer heard a lesson on John Gilpin. Before the children were allowed to read a line of the ballad, they were asked to give meanings for words that occurred in the early verses—"eke" and "spouse" (for which they suggested "suppose" and "chaise")—and this, in spite of the fact that the context could not fail to suggest the meaning if the general purport had been grasped.' p. 167.

The good wife orders the maidens to get ready the house, and to make a bed large enough for them. On one occasion I had convincing proof of how the meaning was developing. The three sons were not quite sure what they were supposed to be, and as the housewife was busy with her jobs one of them stepped aside to let her pass, and she broke into speech, 'You mustn't do that. I must step aside for you, not you for me. You aren't really real!' The sons were sent back to come in again. There was no doubt of the significance of the poem left in anybody's mind after that. The brothers go to bed, and the mother falls asleep at the bedside. But at cock-crow they know they must get up and steal away. There the ballad ends: but this time it had not finished for this child. She woke up with a happy expression, looked round, saw no one, grew distressed, woke up the maid and burst into speech a second time:

'They've gone, look everywhere; in the cupboards, under the bed. They must be hiding, they cannot have gone.'

Meaning develops in miming and acting as the child proceeds, and she merges more and more into the characters and the plot. It is understanding at a level where the verbal expression for it has not developed, and will not develop, perhaps for several years. Unfortunately, owing to our methods of demanding explanations of half-born thoughts it may never develop. In the same way a child can express these ranges of meaning in drawing and painting, and often in music, which are closed to her in verbal terms.<sup>4</sup>

Spontaneity must be the key-note of this kind of work. Every class will as surely and differently shape the ballad as the minstrel moulded it in medieval times to suit his mood and purpose. A very small space in a form-room is sufficient for such dramatisation. The school hall is quite the wrong environment. A few desks at the front can be pushed backwards. The actors must be near at hand because once the technique is learned the action should not stop. The audience usually

<sup>4</sup> I have been describing a kind of syncretism of understanding which Piaget found to be typical of this age. 'Syncretistic understanding consists in this that the whole is understood before the parts are analysed, and that understanding of the details takes place, rightly or wrongly, only as a function of the whole of the schema.' Again: 'The child lets all the difficult words in a given phrase slip by, then he connects the familiar words into a general scheme, which subsequently enables him to interpret the words not originally understood.'—*The Language and Thought of the Child*, pp. 151-2. For further discussion of this, see Chapter Ten, p. 109 ff.

arranges itself round the room, sitting on desks and in window sills and sometimes on the floor; wherever the best view can be obtained. In fact the scene resembles the setting of a mediæval minstrelsy in one corner of the hall when the meal was finished more than it imitates the artificial arrangement of stage and theatre.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I wrote this chapter before the modern trend towards arena staging had developed very far. I have recently made an experiment in this kind and have realised its potentialities for educational purposes. For an account of this, see '*Androcles*' in an '*Arena*' by Marjorie L. Hourd; *Theatre in Education*, July-August 1948.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### PLAY MAKING

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#### *I. Dramatisation unexpressed*

THE NEXT STAGE after the ballad mime and the acting of simple songs and poems is the dramatisation of story material. This is the process which precedes play writing, but it does not always end in this, and it is a process which has a value in itself. We as grown-ups often read a novel and gain a great deal of enjoyment from it without entering into the lives the people in it in any *dramatic* sense. Our response is different from our reaction to a play at the theatre. The novel and the play have become two art forms for which we have developed different reactions. Moreover, the reading of a play is, as we know, different from the seeing of it acted. The amount of sharing is different as well as the quality. There is no art form where the sense of our own personalities is more keenly alive than in the drama. It is surely this paradox of losing oneself to gain oneself which has always made drama such a great moral as well as intellectual force. Now this dramatic sense is always there for young children whether they are reading silently or being read to; so that often dramatisation of a most powerful and mentally active kind can be taking place in a class-room where an untrained observer might only be conscious of passive listening; whereas frequently class-room acting reveals a complete lack of any imaginative understanding at work.

There is another form of dramatisation which is rarely taken into account, open to children in dreams. Freud has emphasised this dramatic work of converting the latent material of the mind into the condensed form of dream thought. I remember very clearly reading to a class of children of ten plus extracts from the phantasy of Dunkirk, written by Paul Gallico under the title of *The Snow Goose*. Obviously this is not a story one would use as play material as it is essentially lyrical in kind. The day after the reading one of the children said: 'Do you know, I dreamt about the Snow Goose last night. Such a silly



dream—you know, the sea was at the end of our road, and of course I was Fritha.' I casually asked if anyone else had dreamed of it. One child blushed and said: 'I tried to, but couldn't. I did want to be Fritha.' I realised what a deep impression the story had made and how acutely she wanted to find images to express her identification.

## *II. Getting to know the characters*

But the young child's understanding of characters is not at this age merely a form of identification. In fact, as was pointed out in the last chapter, she is gradually gaining a more objective and discriminating attitude towards the people she meets in books; and it is not sufficiently understood how far she is able to gain an insight into their motives. During a discussion of the characters of *The Iliad* I received the following analysis of the character of Achilles. It was given orally in jerky sentences, with pauses between for thought and with comments now and again from the class. I wrote down what she had said from memory, with the help of a few hasty notes, when the lesson was over:

'I like Achilles best. He is different to-day from yesterday. I imagine he was tall and very strong with black curly hair and his face laughing and ever so nice one minute, and then not a bit nice, all scowly. I think he was spoiled. His mother spoiled him. She was always afraid of course that he would get wounded in the heel. You can understand it, still she shouldn't have done it so much. It made him so that he always ran to his mother after a battle or anything even when he was a great warrior. And then it was babyish of him to sulk in his tent—and he really didn't love Patroclus right. He loved him too much really, because when he was killed he didn't know what to do. He was so upset. He couldn't believe it, so he just rushed into the battlefield and struck out at everybody. He wanted to hurt anybody who came near him, but it was death really and he just would not understand that.' (*Elizabeth, 10 years, 8 months.*)

After the oral discussion in class I asked the children to write about the character they would like to be when parts of the story were dramatised. Elizabeth had said all she wanted to say, and the homework bored her. She gave a few details about Achilles and added: 'He thought very well of his father's spear; that is why he used it when he was angry.'

I have selected below three extracts from this written homework, and six from a similar piece of work given to a class which was two-thirds of the way through the reading and dramatising of the story, and where the children were deciding on their own parts before they completed the play.

1. *Patricia, 11 years 10 months*

'I should like to be Priam because when he talked to Helen he did not take sides like saying "My armies are better than the Greeks. We are sure to win." He praised up the armies of the Greeks, which I thought was very nice indeed.'

2. *Joan, 10 years 5 months*

'I should like to be Helen of Troy, because you cannot tell what she is thinking of. You cannot tell her feelings. Really she was very nice. She could not help being beautiful. I expect she would rather be ugly and not have the war than beautiful and have had the war. I would.'

[This child later decided that she would not be Helen after all. She was too small. I said that this would not matter, knowing this to be one of the reasons for her admiration of Helen's stately beauty. But children like a resemblance of physical attributes, and the feelings of the rest of the form were very strong, and this matters most to children of this age.]

3. *Phyllis, 11 plus*

'I should like to be Zeus. I think he is interesting because he is so strong and powerful. He is a good-tempered god and is very fair and just. He changes his mind and lets his wife have her own way in many things.'

4. *Anne, 10 years 7 months*

'I would like to be Agamemnon because I would like to be in the quarrel. Agamemnon is very kingly and great and thinks he is the only pebble on the beach.'

5. *Nina, 11 years 4 months*

'I would like to be Andromache because Andromache has a brave husband.'

6. *Susan, 11 plus*

'I should like to be Hera, because of the way she talks. I think she would be pretty and have a temper.'

7. *Vera, 11 plus*

'I would like to be Priam because I like the way he talks and acts. He is kind, very anxious about his sons and does not like war.'

8. *Brenda, 11 plus*

'I would like to be Helen or Menelaus because neither gets killed.'

9. *Audrey*, 11 *plus*

'In a play I should prefer to be Hector because I am tall! I mean it would be silly to have a short person to take his place.<sup>1</sup> Also I think Hector was a better man than most of the others, except Priam, who is my second choice. I should like to be Priam because I admire the way the old king manages everything in general. The third and fourth choices are Achilles and Agamemnon. I choose these two for they take a scene between them. The quarrel it is called. In it everybody is sarcastic to everybody else. And whichever part I took of these two, I should enjoy taking very much.'

*The Iliad* has always seemed to me to be the perfect material for dramatisation in this transitional stage between later childhood and early adolescence. As can be seen in these examples the emotional reactions of the chief characters have a primitive sublimity well within the child's grasp. It is true that very different levels of understanding have been reached in these confessions, but Elizabeth has penetrated deeply into the sources of conflict in Achilles. She has her finger right on the pulse of the Oedipus Complex, and the homosexual stress in his character.

It is sometimes urged that these stories may be good material for the 'academic stream' but that children in the 'modern stream' will need stories nearer to their everyday life. But all children go home to a life of feeling and thought; mother and father loving each other, mother and father quarrelling, brothers and sisters loving and hating; birth and death. It is a life which is utterly baffling to them and which needs as much interpretation as the world of things and natural phenomena. Literature is as much a means of this interpretation and a criticism of life to a child as it is to us.<sup>2</sup> The child needs the teacher, however, to make the right introduction; for if these characters are not

<sup>1</sup> See preceding comment on 2, Joan.

<sup>2</sup> A superb example of this is given by Mrs. Louise Cuttall, the secretary of the Bermondsey Children's Drama Festival Committee, who reproduces in *Theatre in Education*, May 1947, *Shakespeare in Bermondsey*, the dialogue of a piece of dramatisation from a group of children (8-12 year olds) of the Penguin Club of the Time and Talents Settlement. The children have interpreted the murder scene in *Macbeth* in terms of their environment, and neither Bermondsey nor Glamis are essentially betrayed! This has been reprinted in *Informal Education*, J. Macalister Brew, pp. 280-281, which, however, wrongly refers to the age-group as 14 years. This is essentially a pre-adolescent's view of his world.

powerful symbols in our minds, they cannot so easily influence her. For the wrath of Achilles to come to life the teacher must understand on the most mature level open to him the nature of that anger. He must also appreciate the kind of release and katharsis that the expression of such anger can give to the child. The Achilles that will materialise will neither be Homer's nor the teacher's, nor a complete reflection of the child. It will be a composite picture of all three. Unconsciously the child is expressing herself; she is consciously enjoying a good tale.<sup>3</sup>

### III. *The Iliad as source material*

It is of course necessary before opening the text<sup>4</sup> to tell the class the story of the events which preceded the tenth year of the Trojan war, beginning with the birth of Paris and giving to the characters the flavour of personality which Homer gives them; but it is not until they have come into touch with Homer's dramatic genius that they will be able to make them thoroughly their own, and this only gradually as the work of dramatisation proceeds. I have found that with this preliminary equipment the quarrel scene at the opening makes such a strong appeal that the children want to act it straight away. Here are all the quarrels they have engaged in or wanted to engage in—or heard other people experiencing—wrought to the highest pitch and adorned with all the splendours of language.<sup>5</sup> The method of reading several chapters, discussing them and then making scenes can be continued to the point where the class will take the matter into its own hands. This happens generally when Achilles joins the battle, then the interest of the story is so high that not until the book is finished can further play-making take place. Achilles and Hector now stand out like giant heroes. One child exclaimed at the end of a lesson: 'I don't know what to do, I like them both so much.' But after the dragging of Hector's body round the walls of Troy she said: 'Well, after that I don't mind what happens to Achilles, the brute!' At the end of the book, when Hector is buried, a long pause usually descends upon the class, and then questions begin to crowd in; the fate of all the characters has to be told, and one must finish the story from other sources. Not until Helen is reconciled to

<sup>3</sup> The principles involved here are discussed at length in Chapters Eleven and Twelve.

<sup>4</sup> The adaption used was *The Story of the Iliad* retold by F. S. Marvin, R. J. G. Mayor and F. M. Stawell.

<sup>5</sup> See remark by Audrey (9), page 40.

Menelaus have they a mind to go back to the play. It is usually about two-thirds through the play that they begin to discuss whom they would most like to be. This discussion does not always take place in the classroom. I was indebted to the games mistress the last time I used this material for the hint. She had overheard them in the playground. For the last lap, group work can quite profitably take place; for by now the individuality of each child is embedded in the play, and her own imaginative angle established. A list of the remaining scenes can then be drawn up which it is agreed will take in dramatically the rest of the material. Narrative passages will have to be written for the whole play as links, a method they are familiar with in their treatment of medieval plays in the function of the minstrel, and from the method used on the wireless.<sup>6</sup> It was a method, of course, which Shakespeare adopted frequently, especially in plays of an episodic kind. When the scenes which are to be written up are agreed upon, then a synopsis of the substance of each should be written down with page references. In this kind of work children must be put into the position of the craftsman and know quite clearly what material is at their disposal before they begin to fashion it. Every child should possess a text of her own if possible, which she can gloss as any author would.

There are, of course, many ways of writing these plays. I have found that a merging of two or three methods is the best. Sometimes it is helpful to act out a scene first with spontaneous oral dialogue to create a structural framework before the business of written dialogue is begun; or the first scene can be a piece of group work by the whole form. But this method I usually employ with simpler story material, so that by the time they are ready to tackle the Greek matter, the method of writing down dialogue has been partly mastered. Not every child need write the whole play—though I think it is a good thing for the whole class to write the first scene. When a scene is completed by a class or group, a whole can be made by extracting passages from everyone's book and linking them together.<sup>7</sup> If a child has only a few sentences in the play, and

<sup>6</sup> Children have a clear sense of narrative and dramatic material. For example, when headings for the scenes were being made, one child wrote: 'The sighing after Hector, not the burning.'

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the method which was used by the B.B.C. in their *To Start You Talking* programmes described in the book with this title. The contribution by A. W. Coysh, Chapter II, on 'Preparing the programmes' is relevant here.

has joined in the general discussion, she feels the result to be shared. The experience of dramatising is far more important than the result, and what is finished in children's minds is often not finished in ours and vice versa. Sometimes the teacher must allow for the kind of abortive attempts which all artists make from time to time, instead of insisting on completion with that obsessional zeal for thoroughness which is so often the mark of the profession. Moreover, spontaneous and delightful as these child-made plays are, they are not suited to the elaboration of public performance. They may not even stand up to a performance at all outside the classroom, when children should use their scripts as dramatists trying out their craft rather than as actors interpreting a finished composition. There is not much profit to the child in learning her own dialogue by heart. Much will also depend upon the span of interest which the intelligence and general development level of the class will determine.

I have selected for the next chapter three typical scenes from one of these *Iliad* plays. They illustrate two of the methods indicated above. The first and second scenes were constructed by me from work by groups of the form. That is to say, about eight or nine books would have been extracted from. The third scene was, as far as I remember, written by three children who had chosen the chief parts in it; but it is completely dominated by one child who was Nestor. The scene reads just as she speaks. The method where the teacher makes the selection has advantages. She can set a standard in construction, and work in all the best material; but she must not, of course, tamper with the dialogue without the permission of the writers. I have rarely found it necessary to do more than add a few phrases for links, and these I indicated by underlining them in my completed script. Whenever I have suggested alterations I have usually found myself to be wrong, and the result patchwork.

As the plays result from the work of many children the finished result is rarely an artistic whole, which is a further reason for not presenting it to an audience. I encouraged the writers to use their own language as far as possible and to reach their own idiom. At first the dialogue of the text is closely adhered to and the first scene, which in this play was the quarrel scene, is an uneasy compromise, just as we are often not sure in what language to address strangers. As soon as the characters are taken into their own circle, the fear vanishes and the scenes gain in personal interpretation. The Olympus scene, which was the second of this play, follows very closely the ideas

and sequence of events which appear in the child's original; but the reader can see by comparing the versions that the language is slowly becoming colloquialised. The departures from the source in idea are printed in capitals; but by the time the class reached the next scene on the walls of Troy they were gaining grip of their characters, and it was not possible to bring in every original addition and still preserve a unity of scene—so most of the material about Helen and her suitors came from one book, and the conversation between the Lords from another. In fact, as more of the dialogue of this scene is original than not, I have here put Homer's material into capitals. The third scene has departed from its source not only in language but also in plot. In fact, so completely has this child taken the characters into herself that she has lost touch with her text and given to the whole a kind of 'clumsy' flavour—and yet Homer has not essentially suffered. Achilles is still Achilles; Nestor, Nestor: and what a kindly influence has been wrought upon the child's reading of her schoolgirl periodicals; and how much better is the complete sincerity of this than the imitations of archaisms and pseudo eloquence that so many school plays display—and, moreover, writers of plays for children are often misled into producing this pseudo kind of expression. As these examples show, the plays which children write when they are left alone with their sources present a naïve mixture of humour and pathos, dignity and fun, which bear a strong resemblance to the style of the old miracle and mystery plays. I have also noted, and this especially in plays on the *Morte d'Arthur* theme, that the nearer the story reaches the tragedy of the events, the closer the children cling to the words of the book, even though earlier scenes were in their own language; just as the medieval plays claimed more of the Bible story for 'The Sacrifice of Abraham' than they did for the history of Noah where, as in the miracle play of the Chester cycle, the seeds of comedy were sown.

By reproducing the child's sources for the first two of these scenes, it is hoped that material will be presented for a study of the creative process, a process which is the same for the child as it is for the grown-up; the same for the child dramatising from her text-book as it was for Shakespeare using Plutarch. But as well as this there is much material here also for a study of the child's self-expression as it develops out of her imaginative sympathy with the people she meets in this way in books.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THREE SCENES FROM AN ILIAD PLAY

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#### 1. SCENE II. MOUNT OLYMPUS<sup>1</sup>

(The words in CAPITALS in this scene mark the passages where the child has departed from her original in conception.)

• (The source for this scene is given on page 47.)

*ZEUS is sitting alone on Mount Olympus asleep in thoughts. THETIS comes in and kneels in front of him.*

THETIS: Great Father Zeus.

(ZEUS starts from his dreaming.)

ZEUS: Thetis, Queen of the Sea, why have you come to me now?

THETIS: Father Zeus, I have done things for you, now will you do something for me? My son, Achilles, has to die while he is in his youth. Agamemnon has dishonoured him, would you honour him by giving the victory to the Trojans until the Achaians make it up to him?

ZEUS: But what will Hera say? Even now she worries me for helping the Trojans in the fight.

THETIS: Promise me—O promise me, Father Zeus. Do as I ask. I am sad and weary.<sup>2</sup> O bow your head as a sure that you will give the Trojans the victory.

(ZEUS does not answer, and there is silence.)

THETIS: O Great Zeus, place the staff in my hand if you will do as I ask—or say no and I will go.

ZEUS: Go now before Hera sees you, and I will do what you ask. Look, I will bend my head and everyone will know

<sup>1</sup> The references are from the King's Treasury edition mentioned in footnote 4, Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> Written by a child who wrote: 'I would like to be Thetis because I like to be somebody with a sad part.'



that I will do as I promise. (*He bows his head.*) See also I place the staff in your hand. (*He gives her the staff and she returns it.*) Now leave me. I want to think over what I have done.  
(*THETIS goes out.*)

*Later. The same scene in the evening.*

(*HERA comes up to the throne.*)

HERA: Where have you been all the morning? O great trickster—O crafty and secretive one—which of the Immortals has been talking to you now? How you do love to hide your plans from me.

ZEUS: Hera, some of my secrets are far too hard for you to understand. I know you are my wife, but, well you would not understand. But if there is anything fit for you, you would be the first to know of it. Only when I talk by myself, it is not for you to question.

HERA: O mighty son of Cronos, why have you said that? I never ask you questions, neither do I ever trouble you. But I know that Thetis has been talking to you. It was she that was with you this morning—I can see she has got the best of you—and she has made you promise her that you will honour Achilles by helping the Trojans to win.

ZEUS: Hera, you are always thinking, and nothing can escape you. But you are not going to have all your own way. Be quiet, or none of the Gods will help you.

(*HEPHAESTUS has entered while HERA and ZEUS were quarrelling.*)

HEPHAESTUS: Oh, Mother, please don't quarrel. You know it is a terrible thing if Gods are unfriendly. IT IS BEING UNKIND TO OTHERS AS WELL AS TO OURSELVES. Make peace with Father Zeus so that he may not upset us and spoil the feast. For he is Lord of Olympus and the lightning and he could, if he wanted to, throw us from our thrones. Speak to him nicely and he will be kind to us.

HERA: YES, MY SON, YOU ARE QUITE RIGHT, EVEN IF YOU ARE YOUNGER THAN YOUR MOTHER. (*With a sigh.*) I HAVE STILL A GREAT DEAL TO LEARN.

ZEUS: YES, THAT IS TRUE, HERA. I am afraid that you go about imagining things. Well, come let us feast to our

### THREE SCENES FROM AN ILIAD PLAY

peace and everyone will join us in our merriment and Mount Olympus will shake.<sup>3</sup>

#### EXTRACT FROM THE SOURCE BOOK.

But Hera had marked it all, and she began to taunt him:

‘O crafty mind! which of the Immortals has been taking counsel with you now? How you love to hide your plans from me, and decide by yourself in secret! Never once have you told me one word of your own will.’

And he replied, ‘Hera, some of my sayings are too hard for you, though you are my wedded wife. But such things as are fit for you to know, no one shall know before you. Only when I take counsel by myself, it is not for you to question.’

‘O mighty son of Cronos, what is it you have said? I never ask and never question and never trouble you in any of your plans, but now I fear, and greatly, that Thetis of the Silver Feet, the daughter of the Old Man of the Sea, has won you round. She was with you in the early morning, and clasped your knees, and I think, I think you promised her to honour Achilles and afflict the Greeks.’

‘Lady,’ he answered, ‘you are ever thinking and nothing can escape you. Yet you cannot have your way, and you may be the further from my heart. Be silent and obey, or all the Gods in Olympus will not help you when I put forth my hand.’

So Hera, the Ox-eyed Goddess, was quelled and sat in silence, and all the Gods in Heaven were ill at ease. Then her son, Hephaestus, the lame craftsman and God of Fire, took up the word to comfort her:

‘An ill thing and a foolish for Gods to quarrel over mortal men! Here is brawling in Heaven, and we get no pleasure out of the good banquet, and all things go awry. Dear mother, let me counsel you, though you are wise yourself. Make peace with our Father Zeus so that he may not chide us and disturb the feast. For he is Lord of Olympus and the lightning, and far mightier than we, and if he should choose to hurl us from our thrones——! Speak him fair, and he will be kind to us.’

Then he rose and gave his mother the two-handled cup, and bade her be of good cheer again and hide her wrath, lest

<sup>3</sup> A skilful transposition of phrasing. Cf. the beginning of the scene: ‘With that he bent his dark forehead and his immortal locks, and all Olympus shook.’

For a discussion of the passages in capitals in this scene, see Chapter Five, p. 56.

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Zeus should smite her and none be able to withstand him. Once before, the Fire-God said, he had tried to save her from his anger, and Zeus had caught him by the foot and thrown him from the threshold. All day long he fell, and as the sun was setting he dropped on the island of Lemnos, and there was little life left in him, but the islanders took him and cared for him.

So Hera smiled and took the goblet, and Hephaestus went round to all the Gods from right to left, ladling sweet nectar into their cups, and they broke into endless laughter as they watched him bustling along.

### 2. SCENE III. ON THE WALLS OF TROY -

*(The words in CAPITALS in this scene mark where the child has followed her original.)*

*(The source for this scene is given on page 50.)*

*PRIAM is sitting with his old counsellors around him.*

1ST LORD: I'm sure I do not know what is going to happen. The Gods must be angry. It is a shame that so many brave men are dead or dying.

2ND LORD: Certainly the war is going well for the Greeks at the moment. But now perhaps something will be decided if Paris and Menelaus fight this out together.

3RD LORD: We Trojans will show these fools how to fight before we have finished.

PRIAM: I would not call them fools. In fact they are far from being fools. Their leader is a very wise man.

3RD LORD: I am sorry. I was only saying what I thought to be true.

PRIAM: Now, now, we don't want to quarrel amongst ourselves. I know what is worrying you. It is the strain of this war.

2ND LORD: Here comes Helen. HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE IS, TO BE SURE. ANYONE WOULD FIGHT FOR THAT WOMAN.

3RD LORD: She is no better than some of our women. Take my daughter, for instance. Paris, your son' used to be in love with her once.

PRIAM: Sh! no more. COME HERE, HELEN, AND SIT BY ME.

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HELEN: OH DEAR, FATHER, I AM FEELING SO SAD; and I am afraid that you and your people will grow to hate me, FOR I AM THE CAUSE OF THIS WAR.

PRIAM: COME, MY DEAR CHILD, AND SHOW ME YOUR FRIENDS AND RELATIONS. YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME. THE GODS HAVE MADE THIS QUARREL BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. TELL ME WHO IS THAT BIG STRONG MAN OVER THERE LEADING THOSE SOLDIERS. I HAVE BEEN WATCHING HIM FOR SOME TIME. HE LOOKS LIKE A KING.

HELEN: O DEAR AND LOVING FATHER, I WOULD NOT HAVE FOLLOWED YOUR SON HERE IF I HAD KNOWN HOW TERRIBLY THINGS WERE GOING TO TURN OUT. And now to see my husband and his warriors, it makes me long for my home again. BUT NOW I WILL TELL YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW. OVER THERE IS KING AGAMEMNON, MY HUSBAND'S BROTHER.

PRIAM: You are indeed a lucky girl to have such a man for a brother-in-law. I HAVE SEEN GREAT ARMIES IN MY TIME, BUT I HAVE NEVER SEEN SUCH AN ARMY AS THIS.

3RD LORD: Isn't Hector as big and brave as that man, Agamemnon?

2ND LORD: The quarrel is between Paris and Menelaus, remember.

PRIAM: TELL ME, HELEN, WHO IS THAT MAN OVER THERE; THE ONE THAT IS SLIGHTLY SHORTER THAN THE OTHERS AND VERY BROAD SHOULDERED?

HELEN: THAT IS ODYSSEUS, THE KING OF ITHACA. HE IS VERY SKILFUL AND CLEVER.

ANTENOR: I REMEMBER WHEN HE AND MENELAUS CAME HERE AS AMBASSADORS ASKING ABOUT YOU. THEY CAME AS MY GUESTS THEN, AND I THINK ODYSSEUS IS VERY WORTHY OF HIS POST—AND SO IS MENELAUS. MENELAUS, I REMEMBER WHEN THEY SAT TOGETHER, WAS TALLER THAN ODYSSEUS. I REMEMBER, TOO, THAT IN COUNCIL MEMELAUS SPOKE READILY AND TO THE POINT, BUT ODYSSEUS ONLY A FEW WORDS AND HE WOULD HESITATE, BUT WHEN HE DID SPEAK HE SOUNDED SOMEHOW DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS WITH HIS DEEP, HUSKY VOICE.<sup>4</sup>

PRIAM: If that is Menelaus over there, he looks very valiant.

HELEN: He is.

<sup>4</sup> The child wrote 'deep voice'. I pointed out the simile from Homer to the class and asked them to suggest one word for 'thick as flakes of snow in winter'. This is how 'husky' arose.

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PRIAM: And who are those two men in front of the army?

The very tall man with the lovely horse-hair plume.

HELEN: THAT IS AJAX, Father; the other is IDOMENEUS, WHO IS A VERY GREAT AND WEALTHY MAN IN CRETE.

2ND LORD: Did Odysseus ever propose to you?

HELEN: He was in love with me once. But now he is married to Penelope and has a son.

3RD LORD: I suppose Agamemnon was never in love with you?

HELEN: He was one of my first suitors, but he laughs about it now.

3RD LORD: Did any of the Trojans ever propose to you, other than Paris?

PRIAM: Aren't we asking rather a lot of questions?

HELEN: BUT I CANNOT SEE MY TWO BROTHERS, CASTOR AND POLLUX. PERHAPS THEY DID NOT COME HERE WITH THE REST, BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT I WAS NOT WORTH FIGHTING FOR.

*(Silence a moment, then a commotion outside. Enter HERALD.)*

HERALD: Where is King Priam? *(He comes on to the wall.)*

KING PRIAM, AGAMEMNON AND HECTOR BOTH WANT YOU TO GO TO THE PLAIN OUTSIDE THE TOWN AND TAKE THE OATH WITH THEM. PARIS AND MENELAUS ARE GOING TO FIGHT FOR HELEN, AND THE VICTOR IS TO HAVE HER FOR HIS WIFE.

PRIAM: COME, ANTENOR, FOR I CANNOT BEAR TO SEE THIS FIGHT. Heaven knows which will deal the fatal blow.

*(He goes down with ANTENOR.)*

HELEN: I wonder who will win. Menelaus is a good fighter; and Paris is very handsome. Oh! but being handsome does not count in a battle. I must leave. I want to find a messenger to run a message for me.

*(HELEN goes out.)*

2ND LORD: She is worth fighting for, all right.

1ST LORD: Yes, she is beautiful.

2ND LORD: In fact, I suppose she is the most beautiful woman in all the world.<sup>5</sup>

EXTRACT FROM SOURCE BOOK.

Now Priam was sitting on the tower with his counsellors, old men whose time for war was past, and as they sat there they

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of points in this scene see Chapter Five, pp. 57-60.

saw Helen coming to the walls. And they said among themselves, 'Little wonder that Trojans and Greeks should endure so much for such a woman; she is fair as the Goddess of Heaven. Yet fair as she is, better she should go home again than stay to bring ruin on us and on our children.'

But Priam called Helen to him and said, 'Come, dear child, and sit by me and show me the man that was your husband, and all your kinsfolk and your friends; it is not you who are to blame, but the Gods, who brought the sorrow of this war upon me. Tell me now who is yonder noble champion in the Achaian host; there are others taller than he, but none so like a king.'

And Helen answered, 'Shame on me, dear and honoured father! Would that I had chosen death before I followed your son hither, leaving my home and my young daughter and my friends! But that is now past recall, and the tears for it wear out my life. Come, I will tell you what you ask. Yonder is Agamemnon, son of Atreus, a good king and a stout spearsman, my husband's brother in my former life.'

'O happy son of Atreus,' said the old man, 'happy child of fortune! How many they are, the Achaians who follow you! I have seen great armies in my time, I have seen the Phrygians, when the Amazons came against us, but never an army like this. But tell me who is that other chief, shorter than Agamemnon by the head, but broader-shouldered, who is marshalling the ranks of war?'

And Helen told him, 'That is the wise Odysseus, son of Laertes, ruler of rocky Ithaca, the craftiest of men.'

'True, lady,' said Antenor, the wise lord, 'I remember when he and Menelaus came to Troy on the embassy for you. Both were my guests, and I loved them both and learnt their worth. Menelaus was taller by the head than all the Trojans, but when the two of them sat together Odysseus seemed the statelier. And in the council Menelaus spoke readily and to the point, few words, as became the younger man, but none amiss. Odysseus, when he rose, would stand at first with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his staff held straight before him, like a man of no address. But when you heard the deep tones of his voice and the words thick as flakes of snow in winter, there was no man on earth who could match Odysseus then.'

And after that Helen showed them the mighty Ajax, the bulwark of the host, and Idomeneus from the isle of Crete, and many other noble warriors. 'But there are two,' she said,

‘whom I cannot see, Castor the horseman and the boxer Polydeuces, my own brothers. Perhaps they have never come with the rest from lovely Lacedaemon, or else they cannot bear to enter the field for shame of my disgrace and my reproach among men.’

So she spoke, but they were lying dead in the lap of earth, far away in Lacedaemon, their native land.

But now the heralds came through the city and summoned Priam, ‘Son of Laomedon, the leaders of the Trojans and the Greeks bid you come down to the plain and take the oath with them. Paris and Menelaus are to fight for Helen, and the victor shall have her for his wife.’ Then the old man shuddered and bade his squires yoke the horses; and he mounted the chariot with Antenor, and they drove out to the plain.

### 3. SCENE VII. IN NESTOR’S TENT

*(This scene has combined the ideas of several passages and invented more. Cf. K.T. page 82 to page 85, and page 100 to page 102.)*

SCENE: *In Nestor's tent.*

CHARACTERS: NESTOR

NESTOR’S SLAVE-MAIDEN

MACHAON

SETTING OF STAGE: NESTOR is lying on a couch deep in thought. His slave is preparing a meal, and MACHAON is lying down with a wound in his leg. It is bandaged up to his thigh.

NESTOR (*Looking up*): How was the battle going on when you left it, Machaon?

MACHAON: Well, the Greeks were being beaten and Diomedes, Odysseus and Agamemnon were wounded.

*(He opens his mouth as if to say something more, but PATROCLUS walks in.)*

PATROCLUS: Oh, Nestor, I want to speak to you.

NESTOR: Sit down and share our meal, Patroclus.

PATROCLUS: I cannot, Nestor. Achilles sent me to see if that was a Trojan prisoner you’d brought in because he wanted to question him.

*(Pause.)*

I can see it is Machaon, though.

NESTOR: Just before you go, Patroclus, about Achilles not going to the war; it’s not fair of him, is it? I mean, things

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like that quarrel he had with Agamemnon are best forgiven and forgotten.

PATROCLUS: Yes, if he'd only let me go to the war in his armour I might be able to hearten the Greeks.

NESTOR: That's a good idea.

PATROCLUS: Do you really think so?

NESTOR: Yes I do! Now listen. Achilles is your friend, isn't he?

PATROCLUS: Yes.

NESTOR: Well, listen to me. If you go to him and say that you might hearten the Greeks, and win honour for him, he might let you go. I know how keen he is to get the better of Agamemnon. Go now and ask him.

PATROCLUS: All right. I'll go straight away and ask him, but I know it won't be easy.

*(He turns, but Achilles is standing in the doorway.)*

PATROCLUS: Oh! *(Surprised.)* Here he is coming. Whatever can have brought him *here*?

*(Just then Achilles walks in.)*

ACHILLES: Oh, there you are, Patroclus. What mother's meeting is going on here? Am I allowed to know what the Greeks are saying of Achilles?

PATROCLUS: Achilles, we *have* been talking about you. If you won't go to the war, then let me go instead of you, wearing your armour. I might hearten the Greeks.

ACHILLES: No, why should I? If I lose you, the army will lose a great warrior. *(Angrily.)* Anyway, I don't care about the army, I'm concerned with you!

PATROCLUS: Please let me, Achilles, because in your armour I might hearten the Greeks, and if we won they would act fairly towards you again. But if they win without you (as they think) they'll brand you as a traitor. You wouldn't like that, would you? *(Coaxingly.)*

*(NESTOR, who has been listening quietly, breaks in.)*

NESTOR: Every word Patroclus says is true, Achilles. Let him wear your armour.

ACHILLES: All right, but come back as soon as you've driven the Trojans from the ships. Give me that promise.

PATROCLUS: I promise to fight for the Greeks, Achilles.

ACHILLES: If you must go, then go now. Come to my tent for the armour.

NESTOR: Good luck!<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of this scene, see Chapter Five, p. 55.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CHILD PLAYWRIGHT

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#### *I. Shakespeare and the Child Dramatist in relation to their sources*

IT IS on the whole perhaps true to say that Shakespeare used his sources to save himself trouble; that he was not much concerned with history as such, but chiefly with men and women and their emotional make-up. He was more interested in his own times than in the past. Even though there is much evidence that he was moved by the grandeur of Rome, yet he did not attempt to penetrate further beyond Plutarch's prejudice in his picture of Caesar; nor is there anything particularly Homeric about the Greeks and Trojans of *Troilus and Cressida*. Moreover, the characters which he invents or develops from slight material in his plots are usually true Elizabethans. The cynical detachment of Enobarbus, the disillusioned bitterness of Thersites are products of the Renaissance spirit. Achilles was probably imagined with Essex in mind and Ulysses with Burleigh. Agamemnon is more of an English general than a Greek warrior.<sup>1</sup> These figures served his purpose, which was 'to paint the passions' and reflect his times.

Now the child dramatist shows a similar disregard for literary and historical truth; but whereas Shakespeare was probably fully conscious of what he was doing, allowing for the fact that historical realism had not developed very far in his day, the child on the whole is unconscious. She thinks she is following Homer and re-telling a good tale; the Greeks are still heroic, even though she may be aware of their weaknesses as we saw in the evidence gathered in Chapter Three; but in fact she is describing the reflection which these characters make in herself. As we have seen, it is first of all an identification and then a broader interest in human beings which enables her to absorb the people she meets in books. Winifred, the chief

<sup>1</sup> An interesting touch of this kind was given in a recent production of *Troilus and Cressida* in the Open-Air Theatre, Regent's Park, where Agamemnon wore a Montgomery beret!

author of the third extract in the previous chapter, dramatised the story through her identification with the father figure of Nestor; then she widened out to include Achilles and Patroclus, who are nevertheless the good and bad children; and through these symbols she works out her ideas of fair play and good fellowship. In fact on the surface these plays reflect a level of development more than individuality, and this is one reason why the dialogue is so easy to piece together. The children are establishing themselves socially in relation to others, and Achilles, Hector, Priam and the rest line up with their fellow beings as part of the environment. So whereas Shakespeare and the mature dramatist reflect their times and search through their characters for the universal human feelings, the child reflects her home and school background whilst unconsciously seeking her own prototype.<sup>2</sup>

## II. *Child Expression and the Social Environment*

I have noticed many times that in the *Morte d'Arthur* plays, the Archbishop becomes the Games mistress and King Arthur, the Headmistress. For example, in one play the barons are surrounding the anvil through which is thrust the famous sword, and quarrelling about their claims to the throne. Then the Archbishop enters, and the dialogue continues:

ARCHBISHOP: What is all this noise about? Get into line and try your strength and skill.

FIRST BARON: That is not fair. The first to try may be king.

ARCHBISHOP: Silence! The next knight or baron to speak shall not have a try.

Many of the passages in the plays reflect their preoccupation with the home relationships—and one can hear the parental note: 'I am afraid you go about imagining things'; 'Aren't we asking rather a lot of questions?'; 'What Mother's meeting is going on in here?'; 'I still have a great deal to learn'. The passage at the end of the Olympus scene from which the last sentence was quoted is particularly interesting.<sup>3</sup> The child who

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, by Susan Isaacs. 'The child re-creates selectively those elements in past situations which can embody his emotional and intellectual needs of the present situation. (Incidentally, his play is a starting point not only for cognitive development but also for the adaptive and creative intention which when fully developed marks out the artist, the novelist and the poet.)' p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Four, p. 46.

had chosen to be Hera in the play did not understand this sentiment when she came to learn her part, and so I asked the writer of it to explain it to her. She began to expound her dawning understanding of the 'child is father of the man' theme, and a class discussion ensued. One child said: 'My mother would never say that even if she did think it.' 'Oh, I don't know, mine would, I think,' came from another, and then in imitation of her mother's voice another put in: 'My mother's always saying to me, "My child, you don't understand, but you will some day."' And so it flowed on until I stopped it and got back to the business of the scene. The reader will have noticed many other characteristics of child development expressed through these plays, the cumulative tendency, for example, in the interrogation of Helen by the old warriors in the scene on the walls of Troy. The rivalry and unconquerability of this age can be traced in the remarks of the beautifully characterised Third Lord—an addition to the source, like Enobarbus. The child does, of course, also reflect the standards of the age in which she lives. Her treatment of 'the proposals' made to Helen reflects twentieth century middle class morality rather than the Greek attitude just as Shakespeare's treatment of women in *Troilus and Cressida* is Elizabethan rather than Greek; whilst the phrase 'it is the strain of this war' comes very topically from a child who had just experienced one of the most strenuous wars of history.

### *III. The Danger of the Psychological Interpretation*

This is the point where perhaps a word of warning is necessary against what might be called the danger of the psychological interpretation of child expression. On the whole it is not possible for the teacher to give the attention to children's work which it deserves, and for two reasons. In the first place he has not the time even if he has the equipment, and in the second, whilst he is teaching he is an integral part of the lesson, and cannot easily stand away from it.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless this does not justify his disregard of any attempts which can be made by others or by himself afterwards to penetrate more deeply into the underlying significance of this imaginative process; for the teacher who scorns every kind of child analysis is likely to be either a sentimentalist or a bad practitioner. But some of these

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the teacher-child relationship, see Chapter Eleven.

methods seem to me less dangerous than others. I read the scene on the walls of Troy to a group of students and asked for their comments. One student remarked that she imagined that the child who invented the third lord was very self-assured and confident. Now this reading back from the expression of the child to conclusions about his temperamental type seems to me to be full of pit-falls without conclusive evidence from other sources. First of all it is not possible, outside the analyst's consulting room, to know what compensations and defensive mechanisms the child is seeking through these symbols, and secondly, it makes the child vulnerable in a position where we may not be able to help her. She is wonderfully safe masquerading as Nestor or Achilles or if she displays merely the characteristics of an age-group; but as soon as the typologists get to work on her, and she is labelled—introvert or extrovert; timid, confident; submissive, aggressive; and so on—then the dynamic, transmutable qualities of her personality are likely to be lost sight of. The failure to grasp also the ambivalence of a child's nature leads to a falsification of her character.<sup>5</sup> We must all have suffered from 'the reputation' at school which was founded on too slight evidence of good and bad work and behaviour; and every English teacher is aware of the halo effect of a child's work. We grow to expect one thing and may therefore not notice when we are given another.<sup>6</sup>

But there are times when from classroom evidence we are in a safer position to notice temperamental qualities. For example, the child who chose to be Priam, and who had a large share in the writing of the Trojan scene, was at that time the class buffoon, clumsy and awkward, and her actions often drew exasperated cries from her class-mates: 'Oh Vera, stop it—' 'Keep still—' 'You would', and so on; and yet at the same time they gained a great deal of satisfaction from her naughtiness. They protested strongly when I chose her for Priam: 'Vera can't be Priam . . . she's so silly . . . he was dignified and a king and ever so nice! Vera's always acting the goat.' The child pouted and objected: 'I'm not; I don't; I can be Priam.' I said that I thought she would make an excellent Priam and that if she acted the goat instead of Priam she could always be turned out. She took the part very well, working into the character the sage, well-balanced and infinitely kind person

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Ten, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of this in relation to the Gestalt theory, see Chapter Thirteen.

that was obviously her ego-ideal at that time. The class soon took this as much for granted as they had the buffoon. I should like to make a neat little case out of this and say how Vera was helped to balance her personality through the play. However, I simply do not know what final effect this piece of experience had upon her. All I can say is that this is the kind of therapy which children seek for themselves through drama, and that it is safe for the child because at this age she thinks we are looking at Priam and not at Vera. The teacher is, of course, looking at both. She is aware of the identification which is taking place, and strives to develop as wide a social sympathy with the characters as she can, at the same time never losing her own objective grip upon the original. It is not possible to obtain sincere work from children if we are using material with which we are out of sympathy. There must be a duality of experience; for it is the alliance of our standard of values with the feeling for what is right and a sense of shape and form in the child which will finally liberate the artist in her. This process we call teaching.

#### *IV. The Child as Artist*

This sense of artistry is clearly shown even in the spontaneous form which these plays take. The ultimate aims of Shakespeare and the child dramatist we have seen are as far apart as maturity and genius can make them, but the process by which they reach them is much the same for both. Perhaps an analysis of this will help us to regard in a new light the whole question of Shakespeare in schools and what a child can be expected to understand in his plays.

There are three levels upon which Shakespeare worked with his sources. Sometimes he merely reproduced and turned Plutarch's rich prose into his own poetic medium of blank verse. At other times he caught a suggestion latent in his material and touched it to finer issues by his instinct for drama, and sometimes he created beyond his source through the vision which was his own.

The process of reproduction is well illustrated in these scenes; but where Shakespeare used poetry the child gradually evolves her own idiom as she manages to absorb the characters. This application of a colloquial style to the old epic material is a tendency also of modern poets and translators, as such a trans-

lation as Louis MacNeice's *Agamemnon* illustrates very well.<sup>7</sup> MacNeice has drained from his sources every drop of significance for these times as the child extracts all the meaning there is for herself and her background. It is better to give children an adaptation to work on which is written fairly close to Homer rather than one written in the modern idiom, so that she can have this experience of translating into her own terms, which is in itself a creative experience.

But dramatic insight is a further stage and two instances may help to show the amazing similarity of this kind of intention. The reader will remember the well known passage in *Antony and Cleopatra* where the soldiers enter to find Cleopatra and Iras dead and Charmian dying. Plutarch writes of this:

One of her soldiers seeing her, angrily said unto her: 'Is that well done, Charmian?' 'Very well,' said she again, 'and meet for a princess descended from the race of so many noble kings.' She said no more, but fell down dead hard by the bed.<sup>8</sup>

This is what Shakespeare does with it:

GUARD: What work is here! Charmian, is this well done?

CHARMIAN: It is well done, and fitting for a Princess

Descended of so many royal kings.

Ah! soldier.

(Dies)<sup>9</sup>

Charmian's emphatic 'It is well done' and the death sigh as she collapses at the soldier's feet are good examples of that perfect economy which drama can use because the dramatist is aware of another artist, the actor, to complete his meaning. And what scope is given in those last two words! Now let us turn to the child's scene on the walls of Troy where Priam points out Helen's former husband.

PRIAM: Is that Menelaus over there, he looks very valiant?

HELEN: He is.

The brevity of this allows for a moment's silence to fall upon them as the old king looks at his son's rival, before he makes his next enquiry. The child has appreciated the conflict in

<sup>7</sup> *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus*, translated by L. MacNeice.

<sup>8</sup> *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. W. W. Skeat, p. 227.

<sup>9</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act V., Scene ii, ll. 322-326: *The Tragedies of Shakespeare* (Oxford Edition).

Helen's mind, which is expressed again with less subtlety but equal insight when she writes :

Menelaus is a good fighter ; and Paris is very handsome. Oh !  
but being handsome does not count in a battle.

Has she not anticipated here Pope's crystallisation of the emotion ? ' She scorned the champion, but the man she loved ' ; and her understanding is contained in the word ' Oh ! ' which holds a like degree of dramatic force to Charmian's ' Ah ! '

But what the immature artist most often lacks is the power to re-create as Shakespeare does so often the very emotion which has given birth to his idea (which is the ability to become conscious in the act of creation)—the power also to pass through the particularities of his characters to a value which is beyond them and yet is contained in them—to pass through the variability, temper tantrums and tenderness of Cleopatra, all of which are in Plutarch, to her realisation that now Antony is dead there is nothing left to live for—one of the most ordinary feelings of life, but never ordinary at the moment of discovery ; and the Cleopatra discovery of it will be different from any other, and Shakespeare's Cleopatra's discovery different again.

And there is nothing left remarkable  
Beneath the visiting moon.

This is the inevitability of great dramatic writing. It is at once universal, charged with the individuality of the character from whom it was distilled, and unmistakably the expression of that writer alone. Such a trinity of comprehension is of course beyond the young child's achievement, but not so far beyond as we may be inclined to think. For although, as we have seen, her dramatic expression is on the whole developmental and egoistical, yet lying in embryonic fashion within the folds of her child nature is the full woman and the artist she has it in her to be. After all, the degree to which this potential artist remains in all of us is the measure of our power of appreciation.

I will conclude this chapter with a wonderful example of the embryonic nature of child appreciation. The class had read among other things during the year *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Don Quixote*. Finally I had to concoct an examination on the year's work. Had I asked them directly to compare the intentions of Bunyan and Cervantes in creating the characters of

Christian and Don Quixote they would quite naturally have given up in despair. But when a question was framed putting the situation concretely and dramatically one child understood the implications to a remarkable degree. The question was: Imagine that Don Quixote and Christian met on a journey, what do you think they would say to each other?

*Margaret, 11 years 3 months*

Don Quixote and Christian met one day in a country village. Don Quixote had been in search of adventures and seeing Christian in a beautiful coat, embroidered with all kinds of stitches, stopped to address him thus: 'My good Sir, I pray tell me where thou hast procured such a delightful coat. For on my word I too would like one such as this, that my Lady Dulcinea del Toboso would then think I was some rich merchant on the sea?'

Christian answered politely, 'My dear Knight, since it seems that you are one, such a coat must be won in the battle of life. If thou would'st wish for one, why dost thou not journey with me to the Celestial City and there not only will you receive this wonderful garment but more heavenly things will be yours.'

'Gladly would I go, Sire, if only to procure such a garment. But first tell me all about this Celestial City. Is it very far from here? May I often come and go, for my Lady Dulcinea would weep her beauteous eyes if she did not see me at least every month?'

'My good Sire, it seems to me that ye think the Celestial City some carnal thing. But indeed, this is not so, for it is the highest place on earth—namely, Heaven.'

'Then may I not see my Lady Dulcinea, ever?' asked Don Quixote doubtfully.

'If her Ladyship come to the Celestial City herself you will see her there for ever.'

'Then for all the beautiful coats in the world, will I not desert my lady-love. Farewell!'

'Farewell,' replied Christian sadly, 'May fortune grant you that which you desire.'

But Don Quixote was out of hearing. He was in search of more adventures.<sup>10</sup>

I believe that everyone who has read these books will agree that here is their essence and spirit; that desire to get the best

<sup>10</sup> It may be argued that this child was in advance of her age intellectually, but there is also, I believe, an emotional anticipation here as well. It is difficult to separate them in any complete expression. For a discussion of verbal expression in relation to intelligence, see Chapter Fourteen, p. 161 ff.



of both worlds which often seeks the disguise of the romantic, and the austere dignity and singlemindedness of Bunyan's Pilgrim. Moreover, the child has unconsciously borrowed in style from both books the inconsequent charm of the Quixotic, the earnest grace of 'the true wayfaring Christian!' Surely this offers proof that children do not only recapitulate earlier and more primitive stages of development (a theory we have heard *ad nauseam*)<sup>11</sup> but that they also forecast more advanced phases and ideas which they will be many years reaching on a conscious, analytical plane: that they are indeed greater than they know.

If, therefore, we put Shakespeare into the hands of children under fourteen, we shall be disappointed if we expect them to explain his meaning to us, or to give back to us in any explicit form their feeling for his craftsmanship. Yet we have seen how far this skill is within their own reach and how far they are capable of penetrating the deeper meanings of literature. But because this understanding is largely unconscious, direct expression of their discoveries will not be forthcoming. It is for this reason that it is more profitable at this stage for the child to become the playwright than the critic—the active participant in a creative process than the passive recipient of meanings interpreted directly by the teacher. I have been dealing, therefore, with the forms of dramatisation which leave the child the maximum degree of interpretation upon her own level.

The reader may be wondering what place, if any, I leave in my syllabus for drama proper and the acting of plays. This is an aspect of education which has been treated now for many years by many competent writers. I do not think there is very much more to add. But nevertheless I believe that the function of the acted play is an extremely important one for children of all ages, and I shall therefore in the next chapter apply my conception of the developmental process to this side of drama as well, and attempt to view it from a psychological angle.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Thirteen, p. 145.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### PLAY PRODUCTION AND THE CHILD ACTOR

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#### *I. Play Production and Child Development*

WE HAVE SEEN that drama has a double psychological function. It acts as a release of phantasy and also as a means of grasping reality. Both aspects are equally important and finally inter-dependent. Just as in play-writing it is necessary to take hold of the values intrinsic to the source, so in play-acting it is most important to remember that two ends must be served, the child's development on the one hand, and the interpretation of the play on the other. Dramatisation is the child's own defence, and she learns her paces to the rhythm of her own personality; but it has also been demonstrated how far she is able to penetrate the further meanings of her material. In short, she needs good plays and she is on the whole capable of acting them well. These plays are not easy to find, especially for younger children. So much of this child-drama consists either of uninspired dramatisation of old stories, which we have seen they can do for themselves on their own level, or fantasies which reproduce the grown-up's fixated idealisations of childhood, although children are amused by them up to a point and so foster the argument, 'they love it'. We shall probably have to wait until child nature is more widely understood before good plays are forthcoming.

However, the choice of play and our attitude towards its production will vary according to the stage of the child's development. I believe that for the majority of young children between the ages of nine and twelve the play publicly performed and carefully produced can be a valuable experience; but for those between the ages of about twelve and fifteen or sixteen, I am not convinced that this is so. If for the purpose of the argument of this chapter we call the aim of presenting a play as a work of art our aesthetic aim; and the aim of using drama for the self-expression of the child, our psychological aim; I would say that between nine and twelve these two aims could be kept in fairly good balance, but that between the

ages of twelve and fifteen the psychological purpose should be weighted more heavily, whilst in later adolescence, that is in the fifth and sixth forms of the grammar school, the aesthetic aim would take precedence.

It has been my experience, shared by many English teachers, that the young adolescent does not take easily to play-writing. She has to a large extent lost the unconscious attitude and she is incapable of that naïve spontaneity we have seen in the younger child's efforts. This 'repression' stage of adolescence will be discussed at length in the next section.<sup>1</sup> In acting, too, there is a kind of repression which, however, is often not realised because of the child's obvious desire to 'show-off'. So occupied is she with her part in the play that the sense of artistry so keenly alive in the young child is often overlaid. She is inclined to lose sight of the character in her characterisation; of the play in her desire to act a part. Her own personal needs are so strong that they prevent for a time the free workings of her imagination. For these reasons it is my belief that apart from class-room acting it is better to leave drama more in the hands of the children. This is generally a time when there is a strong demand for dramatic societies: and in these all kinds of plays can be acted and informal audiences gathered together. I see no reason why the teacher should not become the producer provided that the society invites him, and that he produces a play in which he can believe aesthetically, although he will probably have to lower his standards in order to give the psychological aim its fullest rein. That is to say there can be a middle school *Pride and Prejudice*, a middle school *Quality Street*, a middle school *Macbeth*—but in all these presentations the aim must not be to produce the perfect play so much as to give these adolescents scope for a wider interpretation of their own personalities within these media. The play must be sacrificed first. This statement is likely to be met with a flood of protest from people who have obtained brilliant results from these actors with whom, they will assure me, they have certainly not sacrificed the aesthetic aim. Undoubtedly there are children who have a special histrionic talent which can override this general tendency, or whose personalities are so well adjusted that drama can be a means of artistic expression, but I maintain that they are exceptions. I would certainly

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Nine. The word repression is a much abused word and the definition of its meaning on page 116<sup>20</sup> should be read also with this paragraph.

recommend that these actors should be included in the selective play discussed later in this chapter. Nevertheless I am convinced that much more freedom of interpretation should be given at this stage than is usually the case, and that the danger lies in making these plays into public performances. Audiences have their rights. They should not be expected to make allowances. A colleague of mine was invited to produce a play by a school society and she chose the type of classic mentioned above. She gave the part of the beautiful heroine to a rather plain, ungainly girl of fourteen. I expressed critical surprise and she justified her action on the grounds that the girl was temperamentally well suited to the part, and that probably this would be her last chance for such a role. I admired her courage and knew that she was right. But I do not think her action would have been justified had she given a public performance. These plays should only be presented to the rest of the school.

However, work of a different calibre can be produced with the Junior School child and with the School Certificate and sixth forms. This should be able to stand up to any audience. In fact, it is necessary to educate people who have become conditioned by the type of play we have been describing to receive these other players. Parents so often go to a school performance anticipating boredom but resolving to show pleasure at all costs. They should only be given plays which demand their criticism on its highest level. For the rest, the school should give its blessing to the voluntary society and to informal drama of all kinds. The teacher should treat much of the young adolescent's love of slapdash farce and romantic trifles with indulgence and understanding, never, however, losing grip of his own standards of taste when he is asked either to be producer or part of an audience; even though he may have to compromise in practice. This apparently hypocritical position will be understood by all those who know that it is the true function of the teacher to enjoy the stages of childhood for what they are and yet at the same time to keep alive that 'restless pride' which is always on the watch for promise and has its eye upon futurity.

## *II. The Child Actor in the Junior School Play*

Although it has been said that the psychological and aesthetic aims can be well balanced in the junior play, the psychological one must nevertheless be first served. It is, for example, as far as possible very important for every child in a

group or form to have a part, and the difficult child often needs the experience most. A great deal of patience is required and the temperamental producer is entirely out of place. The children's suggestions must be listened to all the time. Although the basic structures are already laid in the mind of the producer, the harmony conceived, the interpretations of the actors and their individuality must be incorporated; for if they have been trained from the beginning in the free expression of emotion and ideas in the ways already described, they will bring a great deal of experience to the action of these plays—though they will gain in further creativeness the more they are aware of the teacher's artistic grasp of the whole.

Much might be said about the behaviour of the producer. He must be free if he expects the children to be. He should not go about looking harassed and careworn, waiting behind the scenes for the worst to happen, pushing children about as if they were so much stage property, the children nervously waiting for their turns. The actors should move about as though they were at play; and the drama should gradually come into their possession, so that on the day of the performance it can be entirely handed over to them, and the teacher become part of the audience. Nothing should be sacrificed to spontaneity, and in watching children act in this way we should be completely absorbed by the character portrayed and afterwards gain a more profound understanding of the child. Parents and teachers can learn much this way, for the quality of the acting can be such at this age that even the producer can be given up to the illusion of the drama. However, it is not only this more subtle approach that he needs, he must also have a capacity for organisation. Rehearsals should be carefully planned, the details posted daily, and the play produced in as short a time as possible. A play lasting an hour is quite long enough, and three weeks of daily rehearsals from half-an-hour and never lasting longer than an hour is sufficient. The rehearsals need to be shorter and closer at the beginning, then gradually they can occur for longer stretches and with longer intervals.

The teacher's main purpose is to combine the psychological and aesthetic aims; to mould the child to the character without the loss of any sincerity of expression. Sometimes the child leads the way in this process and only needs to be guided in relation to the other characters, sometimes she needs to be shown what she is capable of. This is where the art of acting is

difficult for young children, because in order to sustain the quality of their work much of what is unconscious expression has to be made conscious. The final form is generally too far removed from their spontaneous expression, and a producer must not expect the cast to repeat every word in exactly the same way each time. Lovely things will happen in rehearsals which will be absent on the day, but equally well there will be innovations which the presence of an audience will call forth. These could, of course, not be tolerated in the same way at the senior stage, but here they should be welcomed because the child's sense of form is such that it is extremely unlikely that the artistic whole will be endangered. However, there are occasions when the implicit must be made explicit or much of value will be lost to both child and play. Often one has to imitate the child in order that she shall imitate you and so preserve herself. This process is well known to the producer, but I think it should be used sparingly at this stage. In any case the perfection of some of the acting is such that it is not within the power of the grown-up to recapture it any more than he would be capable of writing children's poetry or painting their pictures. One such moment of completeness is vivid in my mind. The class was miming the mediaeval version of the Orpheus and Eurydice legend. The fairy procession with Eurydice in their midst was passing by the spot where Orpheus was playing his lute. He looked up just as she moved by and a recognition took place, perfectly timed, and at once remote and near; whilst the look of tender despair on their faces afterwards was so exquisitely penned that I do not think I have ever been more deeply moved. The conscious artist would have to reconstruct that emotion in terms of the stage, and it would need an elaborate piece of technique probably to regain it, to make it tell. The young child, as we have learnt before, is not in this sense the artist. Let us take care that we do not force his expression into moulds which are too complicated for his forms. This is a real danger of the public performance of the junior play.

### *III. Senior Drama and the Selective Play*

Drama, however, can be practised with little risk in the upper school for the aesthetic aim is now in full view. Naturally, the development of the girl or boy is still very

important and drama has not lost its therapeutic value.<sup>2</sup> Even the professional producer does not conceive the play out of relation to his actors, nor must he give way to them altogether, although the greater the actor the more will he interpret in terms of his own artistry, leaving the producer the job of understanding his technique rather than of communicating his own; this is another example of where the very young artist does unconsciously what the professional artist does consciously. But the sixth form boy and girl stands between these two poles. They will need their own power interpreted to them, for much of what we say to children in this way is in the nature of recall.<sup>3</sup> The completeness which they have experienced in the nine to twelve year period, which disintegrates in the early adolescent stage, now has to be brought back again on a conscious level. For the first time, in fact, we have the play-actor. Very good work can be done by these performers, as many fine productions bear witness. However, I still believe that, if a fifth or sixth form play is contemplated, everyone should receive a part, although this is bound to limit the choice enormously. A form in a school is a strong unit and the importance of its coherence very great. For this reason the highest level of drama in schools can only be reached when a play is chosen on its own merit and the cast selected from the best available talent in the whole adolescent group: that is, from children of about twelve to eighteen years. In the same way a selected group can be formed within the junior age-range, that is, from about seven to twelve years. These plays should be rehearsed outside the school curriculum and, because their chief educational value is out of proportion to the time they absorb, they should not occur too frequently. Such a production given once in every two years can make an immense contribution to the cultural life of a school and neighbourhood. The highest possible standard should be aimed at, for it is unlikely that anything but good could come to a boy or girl actor using a genuine gift in this way.

<sup>2</sup> Does not this value remain in adult life? One cannot believe that the enormous spread of amateur dramatic societies is purely a reflection of the urge to study drama apart from the desire to find a means of self-expression; especially as plays are frequently chosen not on their own merit but to give the members 'good parts'.

<sup>3</sup> This is borne out in an excellent article contributed to *Theatre in Education*, by John Periton, entitled 'Adolescents in Tragedy' (September-October 1948).

*IV. Play-readings*

There are several other forms in which drama can enter school life apart from those mentioned hitherto: the study of plays in the literature lesson, visits to the theatre, puppetry and play-readings. We are concerned here with those forms of drama which give the child direct self-expression of a creative kind, and these do contribute in different measures to that end. The psychological and educational values of puppetry have been very well explored, and there seems to be a whole field of research waiting in the study of the relation of skill in making and manipulating puppets to the needs of the backward and difficult child. But the significance of the play-reading at the senior stage has not been so thoroughly investigated. The older boy or girl can gain a strong sense of achievement by taking on different parts in readings, by arranging readings and casting, and by listening to others read with critical alertness. These are often the children who would be unable to reach the same satisfaction in acting because they would be unsuited to the principal roles. A very high standard of reading can be reached in this way once a tradition is formed. For several years I organised a reading party of fifth and sixth form girls for ten days in August. Our custom was to walk and to read poetry and prose during the day, and in the evening to read a full three-act or five-act play. These were planned in the main beforehand because the books had to be sent in advance. One girl or member of staff was responsible for a play each night; readers were given time generally to scan their parts. Much care was given to the interpretation of minor parts as well as to the chief ones. I am so convinced of the development in poise and confidence as well as of the improvement in literary taste which this method produced that I feel it necessary to mention this aspect of drama as a positive means of expression.





*Section Two*

IMAGINATION

The work of Imagination in Children's  
Written Expression, particularly in  
Adolescence

Thus with most careful devotion  
Thus with precise attention  
To detail, interfering preparation  
Of that which is already prepared  
Men tighten the knot of confusion  
Into perfect misunderstanding,  
Reflecting a pocket-torch of observation  
Upon each other's opacity  
Neglecting all the admonitions  
From the world around the corner  
The wind's talk in the dry holly-tree  
The inclination of the moon  
The attraction of the dark passage  
The paw under the door.

Agatha, in *Family Reunion*, by T. S. Eliot

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### MATERIAL FOR DISCUSSION

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THESE PIECES OF EXPRESSION WORK are chosen from the *Perse Playbooks* and from my own collection, to illustrate the argument of the following chapters. As one poem or prose work may be referred to in several places, or else as one passage may refer to several pieces, it is not serviceable to place each example in the text of the discussion; but they are arranged, as far as possible, in the order in which they are examined.

I have stated the origin of my own specimens, but this was, of course, not known in the same intimate way of the selections from the *Perse* books.<sup>1</sup> However, Mr. Caldwell Cook's methods are indicated in the notes and prefaces to the *Perse* anthologies and in the two books devoted particularly to a description of his work.<sup>2</sup> In all the pieces from my collection the work is entirely without correction, except in the revision of one line in *Snowdrops*, mentioned in Chapter Eight.

Numbers three, seven, nine and ten of the following compositions have been selected for more special detailed study at the cost, perhaps, of wearying the reader; but in the hope that, by letting them sink into his mind, he will be better able to follow on a deeper level the many observations which I have drawn from them. I should make it clear, however, that I have not chosen these compositions so much on account of their peculiar merit as because of their value as typical examples of adolescent and pre-adolescent expression, and because they reveal in a small compass the fact that the same aesthetic laws apply to child and adult writing. It is easier to trace these laws

<sup>1</sup> When a homework is given in verse composition with free choice of subject there is always the possibility that a child from fear or misunderstanding will copy one out from a book. The teacher cannot always trace these and occasionally I have known children do this who were capable of original work.

<sup>2</sup> *The Perse Playbooks*, Nos. 1-6. *The Play Way*, by H. Caldwell Cook; *Play Way English for To-day*, by D. A. Beacock. See also p. 92 on Mr. Cook's methods.

## THE EDUCATION OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

by intensive application, than by making more extensive references over a large field. Numbers nine and ten are written by the same child; thus illustrating another point that the same age and temperament can produce two very different kinds of expression.

### 1. THE LAKE<sup>3</sup>

The lake is calm and peaceful  
With mountains all around  
And an island in the middle—  
There is not any sound.

The sun is setting on the hills,  
The sky is ruddy red,  
The west will soon be darkened,  
And all will be in bed.

Next morning at the sunrise,  
The sky is red and golden,  
The lake is filled with a golden glow,  
But the glory is not beholden.

*Age: 11, 2.*

### 2. THE CHAFFINCH'S NEST<sup>4</sup>

In my arch of rambler roses  
A chaffinch built her nest;  
The home was made of moss and sticks,  
Wherein the eggs did rest.

She sat upon them day and night,  
To keep her five eggs warm.  
The work of the mate was to keep her fed  
Till all the babes were born.

The young ones grew till they were big  
Enough to fly away.  
The nest they left is full of down  
Until the present day.

*Age: 13.*

<sup>3</sup> *Perse Playbook*, No. 5, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 6, p. 8.

## MATERIAL FOR DISCUSSION

### 3. SNOWDROPS<sup>5</sup>

Little snowdrops white as snow  
You are so tiny there so low,  
Your little leaves they are so green  
With crinkly lines and lovely sheen.

I love to pick you for my room  
You make it look so clean,  
But to pick you is a pity  
You are so very, very pretty.

To plant you indoors is a shame  
For you do so like the rain,  
And when the wind does softly blow  
Your heads go nodding to and fro.

*Age: 10 plus*

### 4. SKYLARK<sup>6</sup>

The skylark flew up into the air  
Singing a beautiful song.  
'Skylark! Skylark! beautiful skylark,  
Teach me to sing your song.'

Up he flew into the clouds,  
Till he was out of sight.  
'Skylark! Skylark! Come back, skylark,  
Come back from your flight.'

*Age: 9, 7.*

<sup>5</sup> Contributed to a spring number of a form magazine, which included besides poems, nature notes, narratives, advice corner, books to read, puzzle corner, recipes and advertisements. The class was asked to try as many kinds of writing as possible. The poems therefore did not result from any instruction in verse-making. Some of the work was done in class, each child working at something different; some of it was done at other times and brought along. I did not see this in progress in the classroom, but it was discussed in class (see p. 35).

<sup>6</sup> *Perse Playbook*, No. 3, p. 87.

## THE EDUCATION OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

### 5. THE BIRDS<sup>7</sup>

As I was walking out one day  
I saw so many birds at play.

A blue tit on an almond tree  
Was singing a little tune to me.

Its feathers were of blue and yellow  
And Ch-ri-si it sang unto its fellow.

I saw a sparrow on a tree  
And he also sang to me.

'Churr' was his noisy little cry  
'Churr', he sang as I went by.

I saw a blackbird in a tree  
Merrily it sang to me,

Its flute-like whistle 'O', very sweet,  
And then I heard another 'tweet'.

I saw a gull swoop in the sky  
And common was his scream and cry.

Then it began to pour with rain.  
I said, 'Goodbye I'll come again'.

*Age: 9 plus*

### 6. THE SINGAPORE<sup>8</sup>

Now when the good ship *Singapore*  
A-started out to sea,  
There were full fifty soul on board,  
Including Ben and me.

We sailed up, we sailed down,  
We sailed o'er the Main,  
Till up sprang high a hurricane,  
Just off the coast of Spain.

<sup>7</sup> Contributed to the spring magazine. This was begun in class. The child said: 'I want to write a poem about the bird songs we are learning about in Nature, but I can't begin.' On the spur of the moment I suggested this kind of ballad opening. Immediately she returned to her desk and spent the rest of the lesson on the composition with the bird book in front of her and with a visit to the Nature mistress in another classroom. As far as I remember she finished it off at home and brought it to the next lesson.

<sup>8</sup> Printed in *Play Way English for To-day*, by D. A. Beacock, p. 128.

## MATERIAL FOR DISCUSSION

The clouds came up, the sky went dark,  
And gurlly grew the sea,  
The waves rose up to such a height  
That frightened Ben and me.

Then up sprang high a frantic wave  
That struck our ship in twain,  
In rushed the waves with mighty blast  
With clouds of spray like rain.

'Man the boats!' our captain cried,  
'There's still a chance of land,'  
We manned the boats without a word,  
A silent, doomed band.

When morning came, enwrapped with mist,  
We saw the land afar,  
'Oh joy,' cried Ben, 'we're yet preserved,  
But I know not where we are.'

(Age not given)

### 7. A SEA-SHANTY<sup>9</sup>

There were four jolly sailor boys  
Who planned to sail the sea-ho.  
There was Nobby Clarke and Billy Brown,  
And Johnny Hawkes and me-ho.  
Yes, all the other three and me,  
We planned to sail the sea-ho.

Now I took on the Captain's rank,  
Said I: 'We'll find a ship-ho.'  
Said Nobby: 'Make it water-tight,  
We do not want a dip-ho.'  
Yes, all the other three and me,  
We did not want a dip-ho.

<sup>9</sup> This was a girl from a lower fifth class. Sea-shanties from *The Poet's Tongue* had been read in the lesson. The homework was to attempt a sea-shanty of their own, bringing in topical events if they chose as one or two of the poems in their books had done. This was one of the very few who did not follow that suggestion, but who worked out a complete story.



## THE EDUCATION OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

Then soon we came up to a pier,  
And near it spied a boat-ho,  
Said I: 'We'd better go aboard,  
I hope that she will float-ho.'  
Yes, all the other three and me,  
We hoped that she would float-ho.

We sailed away across the brine,  
Myself and all my crew-ho,  
And after days and days of it  
We wished for work to do-ho,  
Yes, all the other three and me,  
We wished for work to do-ho.

Then sighted we a pirate-ship,  
The skies grew black with cloud-ho,  
We sunk that ship and all its crew,  
Our triumph cries were loud-ho.  
Yes, all the other three and me,  
Our triumph cries were loud-ho.

Soon after that we made for home,  
All laden up with gold-ho,  
The people greeted us with joy,  
Thought all of us were bold-ho.  
Yes, all the other three and me,  
Were thought of very bold-ho.

Then all four bought a little house,  
And chose him each a wife-ho,  
They had much gold to keep them rich  
And settled down for life-ho.  
Yes, all the other three and me,  
We settled down for life-ho.

*Age: 15*

### 8. DAY-DREAMS<sup>10</sup>

Blue skies, blue seas,  
Yellow sand, light breeze,  
Bare black rocks, gaping caves,  
Circling sea-gulls, foaming waves.  
Oh! to lie on those yellow sands and see  
That sky, those birds, encircling me.

<sup>10</sup> The homework set was an attempted poem from a given number of subjects or on a title chosen by the child. This was the child's own choice.

## MATERIAL FOR DISCUSSION

Smoking chimneys, sooty streets,  
Policemen walking along on their beats,  
Yapping dogs and stray black cats,  
Women shopping in peculiar hats,  
To find myself away from these.  
To feel the free sea-smelling breeze.

Age: 14

### 9. FISHES<sup>11</sup>

When the heat of a July afternoon has reached intensity and the very earth is scorched, the fishes are enjoying a game of hide-and-seek in the waters of the pond beneath the shady cherry tree. The green grass can no longer resist the sun's glare and slowly, reluctantly changes to brown. The multi-coloured flowers have to admit defeat and gradually, one by one, they drop their heads. Yet still the cool fishes continue their game, dodging among the water lilies and the pond weed, while the wagtails in the cherry tree cast moving shadows over them as they play, flying in and out of the branches. Perhaps the flowers and grass envy those little strips of red and gold weaving patterns on the surface of the water as they play. Perhaps, even the bracken on the heath beyond the fence is also thinking of those lucky members of God's creation, and longing for a drink.

But that picture does not stay for long, for next morning, the grass, once more green, is wallowing in the early morning dew, and the flowers open once more to brighten the day for us. But what has happened to the tree and the fishes? The tree lies across the pond having been struck in half by lightning during the night. But where are the fishes? Gone, but nobody knows where. The wagtails have gone to look for them but they cannot find them. Perhaps the grass, flowers and the bracken on the heath are sorry for the tree, but who cares about the fishes? They have had their day, but never again will they be able to tantalise as they dart among the cool water lilies on a hot July afternoon.

<sup>11</sup> In one lesson I read to this lower fifth form D. H. Lawrence's poem *Snake* and followed this with *Bat*. There was little time for discussion because each poem was read through twice. The homework was to write about any creature which interested them in any way they chose. I suggested 'Seagull' as a title; there are always some children whose creativeness is encouraged by limiting the subject at this age (but not before eleven), whilst others prefer to find their own titles. There were some vivid descriptions, some in free-verse, others prose studies. This was very different in conception from the rest.

*Bat* and *Snake* appear in *The Ship of Death and Other Poems*, pp. 43 and 46. *Snake* is reprinted in Appendix I, No. 3.

## THE EDUCATION OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

### 10. LINES<sup>12</sup>

A fond admirer to his mistress brings  
A plum-branch which now in the garden springs,  
He wonders at the meaning of that breeze  
That rustled through his hand, and through the trees  
To rustle to the end, he knows not where,  
—A lover with a mistress does not care.

The blossom waking then was quivering.  
Unhappy few who know not what it means!  
Have you not heard the joyful voice of Spring  
That wakes all living from the land of dreams,  
But touches not the dead, lest it should be  
Condemned to sleep for all eternity?

Is this pure thought that runs right through my mind?  
Or is it knowledge gathered in from time  
To help a schoolgirl searching for to find  
Some words to vainly try to set to rhyme?  
Plum blossom *really* made me think of jam,  
So now, again, see what a fool I am!

(*The average age of the class to which the authors of FISHES and LINES belonged was 15 years 5 months.*)

### 11. THUNDER ROCK<sup>13</sup>

This afternoon I went to see the film 'Thunder Rock', and it struck me as being something which only the imaginative would appreciate. I considered the money as being well spent, while my Mother and Father declared the film to be 'a pack of nonsense' when I described it to them. They thought that only a madman could create a character and weave a story round it. If this is

<sup>12</sup> I have forgotten what the lesson was about, something quite different, but this was the homework: 'Express in verse or prose the ideas brought to your mind by one of the following passages from Eastern poets.' There followed four passages. The poem above was written from the suggestion of these lines from the Chinese: 'Oh that with this blossoming plum-branch I could offer the song with which this morning it was quivering.'

*Lines* was the title given to it by the writer; it is referred to in the discussions upon it as *Plum-branch*. This girl is also the author of *Sea-Shanty*.

<sup>13</sup> This was an essay set after a class discussion on films: 'Choose any film you have seen lately and write about it from whatever angle you like.'

## MATERIAL FOR DISCUSSION

true, then I am mad. I do not mind being left alone because I always make company for myself. I find it possible to become temporarily detached from myself and imagine myself somewhere else. I imagine various people round me. They speak to me, and I speak to them. I do not speak aloud, only in my mind. At such times I am extremely annoyed if some one comes in and disturbs me.

When people are so scornful of the film 'Thunder Rock', I think to myself: I wonder if you would laugh so loudly if you were left to yourself a great deal. Naturally I do not speak these thoughts because, being only fourteen, I am not thought old enough to know my own mind. I should be accused of gross impertinence. Were I older the charge would be reduced to that of brutal frankness. While the thought remains in my mind, no one can be angry, because they don't know that I am thinking such things. They couldn't stop me from thinking, even if they did know.

The wife of Professor Kurtz seemed to change her character at the end of the film. When the picturegoer first sees this lady, she is afraid of the slightest danger, yet when her husband asks her if she is afraid to die again, she is very brave. I also noticed that Ellen Kirby looked older at the end of the film, while Melanie looked just the same age.

It is queer to think that these people had already died once. They spoke as though they made a sacrifice by dying again, yet I have never yet heard a theory of death being unpleasant. According to a priest these people went to heaven when they died. There is nothing unpleasant in that. Newspaper articles frequently mention 'passing over'. There is no pain or sadness in that, though perhaps this is because people would not buy the newspapers if the article frightened them. I don't really see why anyone should worry about death, it is inevitable, so why not make the most of what time we have on earth, instead of brooding over a possibly painful death?

Thinking again of 'Thunder Rock', I realise that I did not know that the light revolved. Also I did not know that bells bobbed about, held aloft by something unsinkable, to warn ships of rocks. The film also showed how the English dislike hard facts and run away from the truth, or rather some of them do.

Age: 14

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### IMAGINATION IN CHILDREN'S POETRY

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#### *I. Imagination as Vision*

IN CHAPTER EIGHT of the third book of *Modern Painters* Ruskin compares two griffins, one supporting a main porch of the cathedral of Verona, and another adorning the frieze of the temple of Antoninus and Faustina at Rome. He describes how the Roman workman had worked by line and rule, fitting the parts together in the most ornamental way possible, whereas the Lombardic workman had not thought it out consciously. 'He simply *saw* the beast.' After a lengthy analysis of these two methods, he writes:

Now observe how in all this, through every separate part and action of the creature, the imagination is always right. It evidently *cannot* err; it meets every one of our requirements respecting the griffin as simply as if it were gathering up the bones of the real creature out of some ancient rock. It does not itself know or care, any more than the peasant labouring with his spade and axe, what is wanted to meet our theories or fancies. It knows simply what is there, and brings out the positive creature, errorless, unquestionable. So it is throughout art, and in all that the imagination does; if anything be wrong it is not the imagination's fault, but some inferior faculty's which would have its foolish say in the matter, and meddled with the imagination, and said, the bones ought to be put together tail first, or upside down.

This, however, we need not be amazed at, because the very essence of the imagination is already defined to be the seeing to the heart; and it is not therefore wonderful that it should never err; but it is wonderful, on the other hand, how the composing legalism does *nothing else*<sup>1</sup> than err<sup>2</sup>.

It is this quality of *vision* in imagination that we need to look for and encourage in children's expression. This sounds very simple and it is; but education too frequently opens the door through which the inferior faculties come in. The teacher himself is often the meddling interloper. I do not think that

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin's italics throughout.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Painters*, Volume III, Ch. XIII, p. 113: 1906.

we can teach children how to write poetry; and all children are not poets in words. Some may use paint or movement or music with more success. But many more of them are poets than we think, and our job as teachers is to leave the way open.<sup>3</sup> I think that the difference in the kind of vision revealed in the first three poems printed in the last chapter is probably due as much to teaching method as it is to any gifts the children either had or lacked. Let us study these three poems as examples of different kinds of *seeing*.

In *The Lake* the child has not *envisaged* his scene at all. There is not one word which gives any indication that his eyes were open. True he is not perhaps attempting a description of a particular lake, but his typical lake bears no traces of reality as every good general description must. This has all the marks of 'composing legalism'; and 'calm', 'peaceful', 'ruddy', 'darkened', 'red', 'golden', are not minted freshly to meet the author's needs; they are not carrying any weight. Finally, the whole conception collapses in the word 'beholden'. The rhyme has called it forth—but it has nowhere to go when it arrives. The imagination is not at work in the poem or else the rhyme would not behave in this fashion.

The kind of perception in the second poem *The Chaffinch's Nest* is not as dishonest, but it is quite as blind. Mr. Caldwell Cook remarked on these verses, 'To write with one's eye on the object, untrammelled by any need to moralise the spectacle, is one of the privileges of childhood.'<sup>4</sup> But this child has never had his eye on the object in any vital sense—and every artist knows that having dwelt upon his object with all his energy of vision, he must then take his eye off the object to allow the selective, unifying power of the imagination to work upon it. And the child artist is no exception to this rule. There is no evidence that the boy in this poem had looked at anything but what he expected to find from his nature book; and

Minds which have nothing to confer,  
Find little to perceive.

This is a leaf out of the notebook for all that it was a real nest and Mr. Cook went to look at it.<sup>5</sup> It is as dead as a pressed flower.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>4</sup> *Perse Playbook*, No. 6, p. viii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Now in the third poem, the imagination is doing its work at top speed. This is the kind of vision which Ruskin called 'seeing to the heart'. The eye has certainly rested on the object—colour, size, position, texture; all are there in the first four lines. In the second and third verses, the child's eye moves and takes in the snowdrop's world and then relates it to her own. So that when we return to the breathing, nodding flowers of the last two lines, it is with our own vision of them enlarged and deepened. Nothing is seen with the eye of the imagination which does not produce an accompaniment of feeling. The child may or may not moralise the scene—that is not the point. The question is whether she has felt with her senses awake; if she has, then the morality which follows will be an intrinsic part of the whole vision, as is the exquisite morality of this little piece. The type of moralising in Mr. Cook's mind was probably the reflective kind of Wordsworth's stanza,

Behold, within the leafy shade,  
Those bright blue eggs together laid!  
Once the chance-discovered sight  
Gleamed like a vision of delight.<sup>6</sup>

This is certainly not a child's thought. It is his privilege, however, to record the *feeling* of his discovery of the eggs as well as the fact of it. It is not 'the interest by thought supplied' that we look for in children but a sensitive response to the world around. Again, however, I suspect that the chaffinch discoverer was as sensitive as most children but that he had 'the composing legalism' so much in mind that it had never occurred to him that it was his own feelings and his own mode of expression that were wanted. Notice how the poet of *Snowdrops* uses everyday phrases, 'you make it look', 'it is a shame', 'you do so like', and how she makes them dance attendance upon her thought with perfect grace; whereas the little boy is at the mercy of his quatrain structure, cribbed and confined by it like a prisoner.

The reader has probably noticed a false note in the last line of the first verse of *Snowdrops*; 'an artificial bloom in a bowl of fresh flowers', as one person remarked upon it. At first the child wrote:

With crinkly white lines in between

<sup>6</sup> *The Sparrow's Nest*, p. 79 (Oxford edition).

I praised the line when I read the poem to the class, and was met by the comment from one child: 'But it isn't true, it's the crocus that has the white lines.' Some agreed, some contradicted, and I did not know. One said, 'It doesn't matter in poetry if it sounds nice.' I objected to this, of course. We sent some one down to the garden at once to produce a leaf from each plant. In the face of such evidence the line had to be changed. 'Crinkly' was left as being true enough of the snowdrop and 'lovely sheen' came as an attempt to describe the glossy effect and still find a rhyme. But nobody really liked the new line, least of all the author. The point to stress here is that had the erroneous fact remained the poem would have been as errorless and unquestionable in its imaginative truth and more perfect in form. The fact that it was Balboa and not Cortez who first sighted the Pacific has not detracted from the essential truth of Keats' sonnet; nevertheless he would not have distorted the facts knowingly; and had this child realised the truth about the snowdrop leaf when she first set her imagination to work, I have no doubt that a line as good as the first one would have resulted. Children can rarely revise with any success at this stage, not in compositions which have resulted from such unified acts of the imagination as this one has.

It is very important for the teacher to understand this wholeness of the child's vision. The text books lead us astray when they analyse our responses under chapter headings of observation, perception and imagination. We cannot separate the object from the power of our seeing.<sup>7</sup> 'Long before we are able to think about life in general and about its larger problems, we are guided in the pursuit of ends that are not comprised within the cycle of a single perception. And this guidance is effected, not by discernment, but by *feeling*.<sup>8</sup> In the discernment of a perceived event our disposition is a positive factor no less real than the event itself. The feelings which attach to a dispositional readiness for response—either in a single perception, or in a series of perceptions . . . are aesthetic. It is the aesthetic feelings that mark the rhythm of life, and hold us to our course by a kind of weight and balance.'<sup>9</sup> All true seeing, then, according to Mr. Ogden, the author of this passage, contains the aesthetic—is an act of the imagination.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Thirteen, p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> The italics are the author's.

<sup>9</sup> *Psychology and Education*, from para. 35 on 'The Aesthetic Nature of Perception', by R. M. Ogden.



There is a school of thought abroad which is trying to boycott imagination. It says something like this: 'Let us reach a more concise English style. There is too much imaginative work being set in the English lesson. We need to develop accurate observation and logical thought.' And so subjects like 'How to make a bed' or 'How to fill a fountain pen' are set to exercise these faculties. One still sees on the other hand essay subjects on 'The day in the life of a sixpence' or 'The life history of a shopping basket'. These presumably are intended to exercise the imaginative faculty. Surely faculty psychology has been exploded for a long time. To write convincingly about the making of a bed one must certainly use imagination, both in imagery relating to all the senses, in this case not omitting kinaesthetic imagery, and also in order to relate the process to the objects used in it, and a sequence of actions to the purpose and method of the performer. This unifying aspect of the imagination is as important as the 'seeing to the heart' which Ruskin mentioned; in fact one follows upon the other. Once true vision has taken place, then the laws of the imagination are put into operation. The artist may not be fully aware of the nature of these laws, but he will be guided by them nevertheless. The majority of poets it would seem write according to their own vision and then later analyse the laws by which intuitively they have been led.

## *II. Imagination as a Synthetic Power.*

In his famous description of the imagination at the end of the fourteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria*<sup>10</sup> Coleridge attempts an analysis of the poet's synthetic and magical power which 'diffuses a tone and spirit of unity'; and causes 'the opposite and discordant qualities of the mind' to become 'balanced and reconciled'. He considers the various ways in which this fusion takes place in poetry; how the poet searches for similarities in things different; how he fuses the idea with the image which symbolises it; how he harmonises the 'general and the concrete' by presenting us with the particular in such a way that it is true for all time and also by rescuing from what is true for all time those individual qualities from which this universal validity was derived; often in this way reconciling 'the sense of novelty and freshness with old and

<sup>10</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross. Vol. II, p. 12. The passage is reprinted in Appendix I.

familiar things'; again how he keeps a balance between judgment and strong feeling, for poetry discloses 'a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order'; and lastly how he blends the natural with the artificial so that our attention is drawn to nature, the matter and the poetry rather than to the artistry, the manner on the poet. These are the laws of reconciliation which take place once the imagination is set in motion. Notice the words used by Ruskin of the two griffins. The true griffin *supported* the main porch in Verona. The false griffin *adorned* the freize at Rome. Imagination as the pillar and structure of our thought is based upon this 'spirit of unity' which Coleridge dissects. If it is conceived as embossage merely, then only extraneous rules will be obeyed and these rules belong to the inferior faculties, they are related to the composing legalism.

The two griffin conceptions are closely related to fancy and imagination, and those who complain of teachers expecting too much imagination from children have not made a distinction between these two qualities. When Coleridge suddenly realised one day whilst Wordsworth was reading to him one of his poems that fancy and imagination were 'two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning or, at furthest, the lowest and the highest degree of the same power',<sup>11</sup> he had come upon something profoundly important not only in poetic and philosophical thought, but something of great significance for education, a significance which I shall discuss further in the last section.<sup>12</sup> Much confusion could be avoided if this Coleridgean distinction were more generally accepted. Again, it is important to distinguish between phantasy and imagination, which Ruth Griffiths has failed to do by defining imagination as 'the less strenuous work of phantasy',<sup>13</sup> in *A Study of Imagination in Early Childhood*. Phantasy is often a needful part of a whole imaginative conception, but each possesses qualities not included in the other, and imagination is chiefly distinguished by its synthetic power.

Not only then should we look for vision of the right kind in children's verse expressions, but also for this fusion into one of many elements; if imagination is at work this unity will be present though not, of course, in the complex forms of great

<sup>11</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. I, pp. xxi and 58.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter Thirteen, p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> Page 12.

original genius, but in a simple embryonic shape, and to study these child poems from this point of view is to gain a glimpse of the startling completeness of the foetus of the poetic imagination. This will only arise, however, from a spontaneous conception. We saw when we were studying children's dramatic expression how it revealed, as well as developmental norms, standards which could also be applied to grown-up art. So it is in their poetry. *Snowdrops* and *Plum-branch* illustrate the characteristics of pre-adolescents and adolescents, but the laws of imagination which Coleridge outlined relate to both of them.

In *Snowdrops* we have an early stage in imaginative growth—as far as poetic art is concerned, and yet it also contains higher levels of creative thought.<sup>14</sup> At this age, that is ten years, the child is a realist; the snowdrop is worth talking about for its own sake—‘a little flower, apprehended in the very plain and leafy fact of it.’<sup>15</sup> To the under seven it might be a fairy symbol, to the adolescent it is more likely to reflect her own feelings of humility. But here the worlds which need understanding are her own and the snowdrop's; but never for one moment does she confuse them. This realistic aspect of the young child's work is rarely appreciated by the grown-up, who bestows condescending smiles upon his offspring's expression without understanding its embryonic perfection. And children, not realising this limitation and deeply resenting that particular kind of jocular manner, begin quickly to forsake their own modes of speech, and painstakingly copy the models handed out to them by the adult world; with the result that the precious quality of spontaneity is lost. I wonder how much of the horror with which any new movement in art is greeted by the masses is really the stifled cry of this deeply repressed spontaneity. But if the adult would examine the ‘wholeness’ of conception which these naïve expressions contain he might reserve his condescension for other occasions. So the snowdrops are imagined as they are, and we can discover the same realism in *Birds* and *Skylark*; for although they hold dialogues with their birds, the children are well aware of the complete separation of the two worlds. Moreover, everything is so new to them, that the old and familiar does not have to be given an ‘air of novelty’.

But apart from these differences determined by the realistic stage, Coleridge's synthetic laws can be traced in this piece of

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Thirteen, pp. 148, 149.

<sup>15</sup> Ruskin, op. cit., Ch. XII, p. 151.

writing. The child's intense respect for the life of the flower conflicts with his desire to enjoy it for himself. And this struggle is most exquisitely balanced in the lines of the poem. The snowdropness of snowdrops is painted without ever losing touch with the reality of their presence; the general and the concrete, that is to say, are beautifully reconciled, a synthesis the authors of *The Lake* and *The Chaffinch's Nest* completely failed to achieve. Her feelings, too, are strong but judgment steadies them, and the idea is always under the control of the verse; whilst it would be difficult to find a poem where the natural and the artificial were more delicately reconciled.

In *Plum-branch* the writer has of course borrowed the image, she has not created it; but she has dealt with it imaginatively and developed the idea along her own lines. How different in treatment it is from *Snowdrops*! This girl has forsaken the world she is sure of, and is moving in worlds apprehended but not yet realised. The whole poem is a metaphor—a comparison between the trembling of nature in the spring and the trembling of the lover before his mistress. Idea and image are fused together. Here is the three-cornered structure of metaphor which Mr. Day Lewis points out in *The Poetic Image*.<sup>16</sup> The quivering branch is made more lovely in the light of the lover's feelings; the lover's feelings are expressed by the blossoming twig, and both stir in the reader his own lover—plum-branch—spring responses. So that three existences are set in motion together. The image alights upon 'the still point' of those turning worlds.<sup>17</sup> and experience is unified with a resulting sense of revelation. The plum-branch is not the subject of this poem in the same sense that the snowdrop is of the young child's verses. The subject is a feeling of ecstasy which is linked with the idea of resurrection.

But touches not the dead, lest it should be  
Condemned to sleep for all eternity.

These lines cannot be reduced to prose terms. They have that power to evoke thoughts 'beyond the reaches of our souls' which only the finest poetry has. No wonder the girl felt a little dizzy and wondered how pure this thought was that she had 'gathered in from time'. The *volte-face* of the last verse is a necessary part of her 'steady self-possession' and in this

<sup>16</sup> Page 35.

<sup>17</sup> See T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, p. 11.

way it is intrinsic to the poem. It is in fact just this sense we have that she is experimenting with a group of ideas rather than reducing experience to poetic terms which causes us to place this poem as an immature, but very lovely, piece of expression. It has, however, gone much further than *Snowdrops* in imaginative growth.

The reader may at this point be ready to protest that we do not expect these higher levels from children; that of course they are experimenting with ideas. Yet how many of us do not ask for imaginative reality at all, but are content with fanciful falsifications of experience, and on the other hand how many teachers, I wonder, would strike out verse three of *Plum-branch* as irrelevant and facetious? This chapter is a plea that we should put the child in line with the poet and see how far she will go. The author of *Plum-branch* has gone a long way (she is in fact a poet<sup>18</sup>); but, as we shall see more clearly later, she has not caught up with herself. In the same way the young dramatist was unable to capture the inevitability of expression which the mature artist attained. The reader, however, does not feel outside this poem as he does the naïvety of *Snowdrops*. The three-cornered relationship has been set up. That she has fallen short of the fullest artistic expression is no condemnation, but an indication of the reach which has escaped the grasp, though she has plucked some fine lines of purest poetry in the effort. Therefore in pointing out these 'fallings-off' I do not want us to regard children as lesser poets as we do when mature writers fail, but as young poets—poets in embryo.

In the next chapter I shall attempt to trace the imaginative process further, first to discover what technique should be substituted for the 'composing legalism' if true griffins are to result, then to distinguish different kinds of true griffins, and finally to ascertain the fullness of growth of the finished product by a consideration of some aspects of the relationships between form and meaning, the success of which finally separates art from not-art.

<sup>18</sup> See my claim for *Sea-Shanty* by the same author, Chapter Nine, pp. 92, 93, 94.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### SOME EFFECTS OF IMITATION AND SUGGESTION IN ADOLESCENT EXPRESSION

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#### *I. Two Kinds of Imitation*

THE POEMS which have been mentioned so far (numbers one to five, and number ten, in Chapter Seven) were not based upon any specific literary model, though *The Lake* and *The Chaffinch's Nest* are consciously shaped in the ballad mould. *The Singapore* and *A Sea-Shanty*, however, are written in direct imitation of two literary 'genres'; the ballad and the sea-shanty. These two poems illustrate two different kinds of imitation. The boy who wrote *The Singapore* had just read *Sir Patrick Spens*<sup>1</sup> and in all probability he had studied the ballad style and had taken lessons in metrical science along the lines of Mr. Cook's method.<sup>2</sup> The girl had read the sea-shanties from *The Poet's Tongue*<sup>3</sup> in class the day before the homework,<sup>4</sup> when no attempt was made to analyse the form of the shanties nor, in fact, to do anything with them but recite them together to feel the pulse of the rhythm and the abandon of the style. The difference in the two poems is due largely to a difference in what was expected of the children.<sup>5</sup> The girl was left to her own devices, though, contrary to my usual practice, no choice or variation was suggested in the homework. It had to be a sea-shanty. The boy, on the other hand, was being educated in a bookish tradition. 'A boy's life in school is nearly all books,'

<sup>1</sup> See *Play Way English for To-day*, D. A. Beacock, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> I draw these conclusions from Mr. Cook's remarks in *The Perse Playbooks*, and from my own observations of his work in Cambridge in 1926.

<sup>3</sup> Edited by W. H. Auden and J. Garrett.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 9, Chapter Seven.

<sup>5</sup> As well as possible differences due to the sexes of the two children. For a discussion of this see Introduction, pp. 14 and 15. A. J. Jenkinson asserts that girls 'are not quite so fully engrossed in the simpler, more primitive narrative verse; they are less impressed by exhortation and fine speaking . . . and they are more interested in types of poetry 'potentially more rich and complex, the descriptive, lyrical and meditative.' *Op. cit.*, p. 276.

writes Mr. Cook, 'and his poetry is bookish in consequence. It is difficult for him to conceive of his poetry as an expression of his thoughts and feelings. For him, as it is a set work to make a poem for to-morrow, it becomes rather a matter of learning an exercise in imitation.'<sup>6</sup> He claims that in the last of the Perse books he was able to build up a freer tradition; though there are surprisingly few spontaneous compositions here either. *Skylark* is one of them. Mr. Cook thought that *The Chaffinch's Nest* was another, but I have already challenged that assumption.<sup>7</sup> The difference between *The Singapore* and *A Sea-Shanty* is the difference between imitation and creation. The imagination refuses to co-operate when a work of imitation is in hand. It leaves it to 'the inferior faculties' to get on with the job, and 'a false griffin' ensues. But when a piece of creative construction is in progress, then it sets to work at once with its unifying power, and 'a true griffin' emerges.

I would like at this point to interrupt the argument in order to make it clear that, because I have used these examples of 'false griffins' from the Perse collections, it is not my wish to detract from the work of a great pioneer in education. I have fallen upon them because they were handy, and because the many examples of the same kind which came from my own classes in the early years of my teaching career are not now accessible. They provide such excellent examples of the barrenness of this literary approach. It would be difficult to over-estimate the emancipating work which Mr. Cook did at the Perse School, Cambridge. But a great deal has taken place since 1917 when *The Play Way* was published; and especially through the findings of the psychologists we have come to understand more about child nature and expression. But the constant recurrence in school and, I regret to add, college magazines of these mistaken imitations, either with or without 'apologies to', is proof enough that many teachers are following in a tradition from which Mr. Cook himself was escaping at the end of his career.

But to return to the two poems under review. Mr. Beacock points out how the boy has unblushingly borrowed the line 'And gurlly grew the sea', thus landing on the point of imitation which matters least.<sup>8</sup> A borrowed line or phrase can become an organic part of a poem as much modern poetry

<sup>6</sup> *Perse Playbook*, No. 5, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Page 83.

<sup>8</sup> *Play Way English for To-day*, D. A. Beacock, p. 127.

proves; and in any case such a refrain as this is the ballad maker's common property. It is not borrowing in itself that is important, but whether the author understands the nature of his debt. Is the borrowing all of a piece with his own conception? The phrases 'a-started', 'full fifty soul', 'sailed o'er the main', 'in twain', 'a silent doomed band', 'enwrapped with mist' do not belong to the same imaginative world. The dramatic, realistic world of the old ballads, and the lyrical, mystical world of *The Ancient Mariner* are held throughout the poem in juxtaposition, whilst the boy jumps in and out with his own 'Ben and me' world. As a parody of the ballad the poem has almost succeeded, and perhaps the writer had his tongue in his cheek more than his master realised. He is not clear what he is doing, except that he is following in the steps of the ballad maker rather 'laboriously than happily'; though with an occasional rhetorical flourish. But, like Ben, he arrives at the end not knowing where he is.

It is one of the marks of a work of art that the artist is in control of the situation. He will of course be driven by the winds of inspiration, impelled too by his own unconscious motivation, but he has his hands firmly on the steering wheel. If it is a literary work the reader will feel confident in his author. He will know that he is to be landed somewhere safely. He may not like the spot he is taken to. He may resent being asked to contemplate congenital lunacy in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, or the delineation of the loathsome dragon of Error in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. These are personal reactions, but his trust in the author's steersmanship is an aesthetic rather than a personal-moral response. *A Sea-Shanty* gives us just that feeling of reliance. This writer has not directed her mind to the metrical laws which she thinks she ought to obey; but instead she has given herself up to the imaginative play between the ideas and the verse-form. It is the difference between obedience and submission—obedience to what is not understood and feared, and submission to what is understood and desired—the difference, to press it further, between discipline in the narrow sense and freedom, between all false and true griffins, between not-art and art.<sup>9</sup> The writer of *The Singapore* is imitating the ballad form

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Fourteen, pp. 171, 172. Cf. Coleridge: 'Remember that there is a difference between form proceeding and shape as super-induced—the latter is either the death or imprisonment of the thing; the former is its self-witnessing and self-effected sphere of agency.' *Op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 262.



directly and making up a story to fit it. The tension, which is always set up between form and meaning once a poem has begun, remains throughout tight and unrelaxed. Such verse imitations remind one of tight-rope walking, and the reader certainly wants to say 'clever boy' at the end. But the author of the sea-shanty, following an indirect form of imitation, is using the tension of form and meaning in quite a different way—in the way of the creative artist. She has selected and moulded her own form—but then she submits to it with that alternation of energy and control which distinguishes the formation of any work of art, and which Coleridge described as the 'more than usual emotion with more than usual order'. At the end the reader has a feeling of satisfaction and relaxation because he has shared in a reconciliation. This sharing in the creative process by the reader we saw in the last chapter takes place at different degrees according to the skill and maturity of the writer: but unless real imaginative feeling is at work it cannot take place at all. The appreciation of this intimate and complex relationship between form and meaning is essential to our right aesthetic judgment. If we judge a poem on any other basis, whether it is a child's or a grown-up's, we fail to judge it aesthetically. Aesthetically *A Sea-Shanty* is a perfect poem. But I shall return to this relationship between form and meaning later in this chapter when more material will enable us to go further in our grasp of it.

## II. Direct and Indirect Suggestion

In the poems just discussed the literary model acted as the incentive, but two very different compositions resulted. It will probably have become clear to the reader already that this process of indirect imitation adopted in *A Sea-Shanty* is similar to the process which was followed in all the young child's treatment of literature as a source for dramatisation. But there is nevertheless an important difference. The aim of the work with the Junior School child was not to produce a finished composition from the model set by another writer, but instead to use the literature of epic and romance as a kind of filter through which she might obtain the finer essences of her own personality and reach her own level of achievement. Much evidence was given to show how this process of filtration and also of assimilation was to a large extent unconscious and based upon identification. The material she used for her source was

the hard-resisting medium from which she shaped her own self-expressions, as wood is to the carver and clay to the potter. But slowly this function of literature changes as the child grows up, and she is able to turn more and more to the work of art itself and study it for its own sake. This turning point occurs during adolescence when, as we shall see in the next chapter, creation frequently changes to appreciation, and understanding is on a more conscious level. But we make a great mistake if we imagine that this change occurs with any dramatic suddenness, or that there do not always remain parts of the personality which require direct outlet through expression; and it is the power of suggestion chiefly which opens up the way at this stage. But again we must distinguish between direct and indirect suggestion as we did between direct and indirect imitation. Following the method of indirect suggestion, the teacher will use a passage of poetry or 'distilled prose' according to Keats' recipe in his famous letter to Reynolds, where he describes the power of suggestion in language at once imaginative and closely reasoned, which contains the profoundest truth for the educator. Keats is recommending the indirect method of attaining wisdom, which it is the main purpose of this book to suggest. Literature, he tells us, influences by its mere passive existence and brings to life, life in others. But as soon as assertion and and disputation takes the place of suggestion this power is weakened; for there is not such a gulf fixed between minds as we imagine—not even between the old and the young. We must have more faith in the power of receptivity; for to be creative we do not necessarily have to be doing. This letter is reproduced in an appendix<sup>10</sup> as it is intrinsic to this treatment of suggestion, and also to the argument of Chapter Eleven in the next section.

The state of 'diligent indolence' is the adolescent's most frequent mood—a state in which the whole being is awake, but to nothing in particular, and this is the frame of mind the teacher will require when he goes into the classroom with a page of full poetry or distilled prose. There are many ways in which he can use the passage in a lesson and still keep to the spirit of this letter. He can let the children wander with it on their own and read it themselves; or the teacher can muse and reflect upon it with them, allowing them to bring home to it their own ideas; together they may prophecy from it, or the

<sup>10</sup> Appendix I, No. 2.

teacher may read it and leave them only to dream upon it, so that the symbolism and imagery and all the other suggestive forces awaken thoughts without any intermediary help apart from what will be given in the reading. All these methods, if the teacher knows how to whisper results to children instead of only disputing and asserting with them, will lead to an aesthetic state of mind. Then, if upon this upturned soil it is suggested that they plant something of their own, there is likely to result a composition 'tipped' by the passage, but woven nevertheless from their own inwards—an *original* composition. Now the results which come from such a lesson will vary according to the teacher's interpretation and intention as well as the expression needs of the children at that particular time. But whatever comes the teacher must accept it, otherwise the next time such a lesson occurs the listening will have the quality of diligence only; the children will be straining to produce something to satisfy the teacher's demands instead of yielding up generously what they themselves have to give.

The adolescent needs the opportunity for many kinds of expression and it is important for the teacher to keep two ways clearly open—the way towards conscious understanding of the world around and within, and the way towards unconscious integration; thus preserving in Herbert Read's words 'not only the continuously vitalising interchange of mind and the concrete events of the natural world, but also the continuous nourishment of the individual psyche from the deeper levels of the mind.'<sup>11</sup> As the reader is much more likely to have read and received compositions which illustrate the former, I have included in the specimen collection an example of unconscious integration, entitled *Fishes*.<sup>12</sup>

### *III. The Nourishment of the Unconscious*

In the footnote to this piece of expression<sup>13</sup> the procedure of the lesson from which it resulted is discussed. The planning of the reading to leave no time for discussion was deliberate. The homework was thrown out almost over the shoulder on the way out of the class-room. This is often a good protective measure. One can escape from the room as soon as the answer is given to the inevitable questions: 'What kind of thing do

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter Seven, No. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Footnote 11, Chapter Seven.

you want?', 'How long must it be?'; the best answer to which is: 'Whatever you have to give me. Begin at the beginning, go on until you get to the end, then stop', thus accentuating in the reply the indolent side of the ambivalent mood. The usual thirty essays came in from this homework. A number of them followed the suggested title 'Seagull'. Some were in free verse; more of them were closer to *Bat* in treatment than to *Snake*.<sup>14</sup> This one seemed to me at first reading to have strayed from both poems. Then on further study I realised that there was certainly a conflict in this poem as there was in *Snake*. The paw had appeared under the door.<sup>15</sup> Some deep anxiety was trying to find expression, and *Fishes* was in fact as personal a document as *Snake*.

The subject of Lawrence's poem is conflict and expiation; of the girl's passage, conflict and retribution. In Lawrence the struggle is between reason and instinct. The voice of his education admonishes him to slay the thing of which he is afraid; and the voice of instinct craves for recognition as one of the lords of life. The snake is an accepted phallic symbol and one of the oldest; Lawrence feels that he must slay the source of his pleasure, and he becomes the punishing authority, for which afterwards he is sorry. The fish is another phallic symbol of great antiquity and *Fishes* is a story of triumph and defeat—the story, that is, of every adolescent conflict—supremacy and control, humiliation and indulgence. The girl does not take the punishment upon herself because she has set the phantasy outside herself in a way which Lawrence has not. The punishing authority, too, is outside herself and it is right and just. The gold-fish were happy and triumphant whilst the rest of the world was withered and parched; but soon an avenging storm arose which revived the earth—but the fishes received a just punishment. There is, of course, much more material here for further analytical interpretation.

However, once more it must be pointed out that the teacher's function is different from that of the psychologist.<sup>16</sup> The child needs the teacher to receive his expression as one would receive a gift, and if instead he assumes the analyst's role and begins to interpret the expression in a situation quite differently con-

<sup>14</sup> D. H. Lawrence's poem reprinted in Appendix I, No. 3, should be read and re-read at this point for the following discussion to gain its full significance.

<sup>15</sup> See passage of T. S. Eliot prefacing this section.

<sup>16</sup> See pp. 56–58.

trolled from the analytical one, he will most certainly do more harm than good.<sup>17</sup> But this does not mean that as a teacher his own power to understand both himself and his children is not increased by analytical awareness, and my reason for taking this piece of expression further in interpretation along these lines is to show the teacher what layers of the mind are often uncovered in one piece of homework, and to increase in the reader a sense of wonder at this astounding revelation of the wholeness of response to the suggestion of a poem. I have always realised by the deep and silent attention which children give to *Snake* when it is read to them that they unconsciously understand its symbolism, but I certainly never expected to receive such complete proof of this as *Fishes* provides. And yet this is only another link in the chain of evidence which this investigation is forging, evidence which proves that instead of there being a great gulf fixed between the mature and the immature artist, their worlds lie very close together, their meanings are akin and the process by which they reach them is the same; the same process of dramatisation is followed by both, the same poetic laws obeyed, and now we see that the same type of free phantasy is pursued.<sup>18</sup> We shall further observe in a later chapter that the same cognitive laws are followed as well.<sup>19</sup>

#### *IV. The Work of Sublimation within the Alliance of Form and Meaning*

We are now in a position to study more closely some significant aspects of the relationship between form and meaning,

<sup>17</sup> For a lucid account of the different roles of teacher and analyst see *Social Development in Young Children*, Susan Isaacs, Chapter I, Part ii, and note especially: 'it should be clear that no one person can combine the two functions (i.e. of educator and analyst) to the same child, and that, moreover, it will be an unwise thing for a teacher or a mother or a person in a real relationship of authority to a child to attempt to undertake the work of an analyst, even by ever so little. An admixture of education and analysis tends to ruin both, and can do little for the child but confuse and bewilder him, and increase his conflicts', p. 412.

<sup>18</sup> It might, I think, with some truth be argued that the closeness of these two phantasies is in part due to the adolescent and unsublimated nature of Lawrence's writing. But this is a point which cannot be pursued here.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter Thirteen, p. 146.

and to measure the child's growth and maturity by her efforts to achieve it.

There is an elaborate and artificial pattern in the structure and vocabulary of the prose phantasy<sup>20</sup> which is curiously unrelated to the unconscious meaning, now partly uncovered. In fact it shares the unreality of the dream, like one of those artificial paper flowers which as children we used to drop into a bowl of water to watch it unfold and blossom and then wither as the water soaked it up. Is there not a papery, floating quality about most dreams, and on waking, life, like the bowl of water, gradually obliterates the outlines, unless we capture them and in the re-telling shape them into a more artistic whole? *Fishes* is like a dream re-told. So is *Snake*. One might have begun: 'Now I saw in my dream a pond beneath a cherry-tree,' and the other: 'I dreamt that I was in my pyjamas, and just as I was going down to the water trough, I saw a snake.' The meaning is closely related to the symbolism employed, but the form is divorced from it, as it is so often in dreams, in myths, and in folk-tales.

In the plum-branch poem, form and meaning have entered into a different kind of alliance. A regular metre has been chosen, which keeps pace with the developing idea. They both *experience* each other—until in the last two lines of the second verse is achieved that sense of inevitability which all genuine poetry reveals, a result of the fusion of which Coleridge spoke. In the prose phantasy the form does not *experience* the meaning—it *protects* it. In Lawrence's poem this experience of the idea within the form has not taken place either, but instead of the cover-form we are given the opposite—in fact a kind of exhibitionism. The styles of both the girl's passage and Lawrence's poem are signs, that is to say, of inhibited feeling. These conclusions meet with the most illuminating definition in psychological terms from Dr. Ernest Jones in a brilliant paper on *The Theory of Symbolism*, where he compares the function of symbolism and metaphor.

'The essential function of all symbolism is to overcome the inhibition that is hindering the free expression of a given feeling-idea, the force derived from this in its forward urge being the effective cause of the symbolism. It always constitutes a regression to a simpler mode of apprehension. If the regression proceeds only a certain distance, remaining conscious

<sup>20</sup> Chapter Seven, No. 9.

or at most pre-conscious, the result is metaphorical. If, owing to the strength of the unconscious complex, it proceeds further to the level of the unconscious, the result is symbolism in the strict sense. . . . With metaphor the feeling to be expressed is over-sublimated, whereas with symbolism it is under-sublimated, the one relates to an effort which has attempted something beyond its strength, the other to an effort that is prevented from accomplishing what it would.'<sup>21</sup>

Do not these compositions provide remarkable illustrations of this theory? In *Fishes* the protective function of the symbol is made very clear, for without it the child could not have overcome the strength of her conflict to reach expression. But in *Plum-branch*, where the feeling-idea is conscious or probably pre-conscious, metaphor has been employed. A vast amount of poetic metaphor over-reaches itself, for it is the nature of it that it should. Every metaphor is an experiment in meaning—an effort 'to reduce multitude to unity'—but it is a stage or degree of unity rather than a finality which is gained. For this reason few metaphors can survive analysis. It is not intended that they should. Once the 'still point' of similarity is grasped the poet expects the mind to take flight from there, otherwise the points of difference become evident and disintegration rather than the intended unity ensues. (Would that this were understood in the teaching of poetry, when so often a metaphor is split up and the poetic value of its contribution is lost.) However, there are levels of achievement in the use of metaphor; and these levels depend upon the degree of sublimation which has taken place within the idea.

At this point in the argument aesthetic and psychological values are becoming infolded. Dr. Jones's theory, which follows Freudian lines, certainly suggests that these values are not separate, that in fact a writer is led to chose his figures of speech according to the degree of inhibition within his own feeling-ideas. Jung believes that his temperamental type largely determines his mode of vision<sup>22</sup>; and Mr. Herbert Read has provided a wealth of application of both Jungian and Freudian theories to the art work of children.<sup>23</sup> In fact it is becoming increasingly clear that psychology and aesthetics are dealing with the same values.

It is possible now to add a further tenet to the analytical

<sup>21</sup> *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, Ernest Jones, p. 143.

<sup>22</sup> See particularly *Psychological Types*.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*

interpretation which also holds true for Coleridge's aesthetic theory discussed in the last chapter. There are certain forms of expression which are neither under- nor over-sublimated, because they are perfectly sublimated. It is, I believe, this factor of sublimation which, as well as the degree of imaginative fusion, finally distinguishes a great work of art from a lesser one, or better, a wholly satisfying one from one which pleases, delights, interests, but does not involve the whole being. There is, of course, room for many kinds of art. After all, we live life itself on many planes.

As an example of the perfectly sublimated metaphor, I would quote Shakespeare's lines, where through the lips of Perdita, in *The Winter's Tale*, he speaks of

daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty.

It is obvious, from the context of the whole dialogue,<sup>24</sup> that the flowers are employed as images of erotic experience. Perdita has already referred to

The marigold, that goes to bed wi' the sun,  
And with him rises, weeping.

And later she mentions

pale prime-roses  
That die unmarried, ere they can behold  
Bright Phoebus in his strength.

The word 'take' is the key to the meaning of the passage. Furness, in the Variorum edition, notes 'take' as meaning 'bewitch, fascinate'<sup>25</sup>; but these words are themselves cover-symbols and denote unconscious sources. Jung, unwittingly commenting on this passage, writes: 'Fascination and bewitchment, loss of soul, possession, and so on, are clearly phenomena of dissociation, regression and suppression of consciousness by unconscious contents.'<sup>26</sup> Here, then, the word

<sup>24</sup> Reproduced in Appendix I, No. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, p. 196.

<sup>26</sup> *The Integration of the Personality*, p. 12.



'take' is referring to the bewitchment of the winds by the daffodils and is as symbolic as the quivering plum-branch. Two worlds are united by the symbol, the worlds of inner and outer reality. Now let us for a moment compare this with the primrose metaphor, and we shall see that two levels of sublimation are achieved by them. Our attention is not upon the primrose as a primrose at all but upon the fate of the unmarried maid. But if we read the daffodil passage within its context, and with full understanding of the words used, we shall see that our attention is not divided in this way. The daffodils are real and tangible and an English Spring blows through the lines, but they are not the sentient daffodils of Wordsworth's lake-side because without the impulse of Perdita's love they would never have been created. An instinctive feeling is met by an image which is not betrayed within its own nature: this is the process of sublimation, the use of instinctual energy in the conquest of reality. But it is the skill of Shakespeare's art, and his mastery of the blank verse lines, that cause both the daffodils and Perdita's feelings 'to suffer a sea-change' as they are *imagined* as one whole experience. Lines of the highest quality of poetry are the result of this intricate process.<sup>27</sup>

In this way the poet re-creates in beautiful forms his understanding of life on its deeper levels. There is no need to be surprised that the artists know what the psychologists find out. It is only another way of saying that experience is indivisible. It is again interesting to notice how Shakespeare has dramatised the theories put forward by Dr. Ernest Jones in the passage on sublimation already quoted. Compare, for example, the symbolic flower-giving of Ophelia, the most unconscious of Shakespeare's heroines, with the metaphoric flower-giving of Perdita, who consciously realises the double purpose of her actions. The flowers that are the sweets which deck Ophelia's grave become for Perdita a couch for love to

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that both Ruskin and Matthew Arnold lighted on the daffodil lines. Ruskin saw them as an example of 'imagination penetrative' and compares this with fancy 'which has to do with the outsides of things' (*Modern Painters*, Vol. II, pp. 180-181). Matthew Arnold quotes the passage as an example of the interpretative power of poetry—'the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them *and of our relations with them.*' He is in this definition very near to the idea of the sublimatory force of metaphor developed in this chapter, as my italics emphasise. (*Essays in Criticism*, First series, pp. 81, 82.)

lie on, for as soon as a corpse is mentioned by Florizel, she swiftly transforms the thought

Not like a corse ; or if,—not to be buried,  
But quick, and in mine arms,—come, take your flowers.

What an exquisite enactment in the two plays of the death-giving power of inhibited love and the life-force of unrepressed feeling!

A whole new world of literary criticism is opening up in this close relationship between psychological and aesthetic values. It has, of course, its dangers, which lie, I think, chiefly in our not realising that as well as working together these values also need to be understood as separate functions. For example, we have not explained the whole imaginative work of the reconciliation of form and meaning by describing the sublimation within it—nor vice-versa—any more than we have encompassed the infinitely complex aesthetic pattern arising from the conflict of will and thought with circumstance and fate in the character of Hamlet by tracing in it the workings of the Oedipus Complex; though it is because his personality reveals these fundamental human emotions that he remains, for us, the great and noble symbol that he does.<sup>28</sup>

Now can we see that it is not likely that children will reach these sublimatory points in expression very often? *Plum-branch* shows some of that spiritual detachment (that is, over-sublimation) of many Chinese flowers and paintings; the source is partly responsible for this; the writer does, however, reach an extraordinary degree of fusion of experience. *Fishes* belongs to the world of symbolic phantasy. Children are only likely to reach the mastery of form which the artist achieves when they are moving easily within their own experience. *Sea-Shanty* and *Day-dreams* are the only poems in this collection where this happens. However, we have seen that it is one of the characteristics of child expression to anticipate later phases of development, so that it is important in the English lesson to provide these further reaches, although the resulting forms may not be so satisfactory from adult standards. Let us make room, especially in adolescence, for all forms of expression at all levels of achievement. The urgent need for this variety is explored further in the next chapter.

<sup>28</sup> See *A Psycho-Analytic Study of Hamlet*, by Ernest Jones, M.D.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### THE REPRESSION STAGE OF ADOLESCENCE

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#### *I. Ambivalence in Adolescence*

A QUESTION WHICH IS frequently asked about children of adolescent age is why they are less creative and imaginative than younger children. Two answers have been given in educational theory. One assumes that children's first whole impressions are broken up owing to the rapid development of their reasoning faculties. Analysis has taken the place of synthesis. The second, whilst agreeing that this tendency is apparent, attributes the sacrifice of intuitive awareness to the action of a harsh restricting form of education. This latter view has been expressed in its extremest form by Mr. Herbert Read, who asserts that

The art of the child declines after the age of eleven because it is attacked from every direction—not merely squeezed out of the curriculum, but squeezed out of the mind by the logical activities which we call arithmetic and geometry, physics and chemistry, history and geography, and even literature as it is taught. The price we pay for this distortion of the adolescent mind is mounting up: a civilisation of hideous objects and misshapen human beings, of sick minds and unhappy households, of divided societies and a world seized with destructive madness. We feed these processes of dissolution with our knowledge and science, with our inventions and discoveries, and our educational system tries to keep pace with the holocaust; but the creative activities which could heal the mind and make beautiful our environment, unite man with nature and nation with nation—these we dismiss as idle, irrelevant and inane.<sup>1</sup>

In my opinion, whilst much truth is lodged in both these points of view, neither of them can be accepted, either separately or together, as the whole explanation of the falling off of aesthetic and creative activity, because they both neglect the most important aspect of the adolescent's development; the complex nature of his ambivalence. Only in the light of this can the nature of his repression be understood and the respon-

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 166.

sibility of the educator be rightly assigned. It is true that this is the age when the child's intelligence has reached its highest point of development, but it is also true that feeling is more intense and more personal than it has been since infancy. It is a time when consolidation of thought and disintegration of feeling take place at the same time. The mirror-like stillness of the emotional life of the pre-adolescent now breaks up and feeling can no longer be sought in reflection in the way in which we saw the children seeking their own counterparts in the ballad and epic material.<sup>2</sup> Instead, feeling is real and their own. As was seen in their dramatic activity, their personal need for expression is so strong that they are more interested in themselves in the part than in the part.<sup>3</sup>

It comes to this: adolescents are not as teachable as they were in many ways in the latency period, but they are more impressionable, more open to suggestion, more formative. If teachers and parents are not prepared to accept their ambivalent moods, this suggestibility will turn immediately to contra-suggestibility, and the flexible quality of the personality will harden into the dull apathy which is all too apparent in our schools. However, once the educator has recognised the complexity of this ambivalence, that the *same* child is rebellious and submissive, hostile yet seeking love, cocksure yet needing assurance, daring and afraid, open and secretive, showing off and shy, reasoning and irrational, then it will be clear that what is needed is an educational technique which will give sanction to both sides of what is the same feeling need. What a wonderful picture the plum-branch poem gave of this polarity. The teacher's debt to the adolescent, if he would retain imaginative expression, is to take away the fear of feeling<sup>4</sup> and to acknowledge the reality and value of conflict. His it is to be imaginative, in the Coleridgean sense, and to reconcile the discordant elements of these ambivalent moods.

But this is not to say that all learning should be orientated towards art and the expression of feeling at the expense of science or the logical ordering of the mind. For children at this age will seek facts as a kind of solace. It is their own need which calls for 'the logical activities which we call arithmetic and geometry, physics and chemistry, history and geography', and not only the imposition of an educational

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Six, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> This function of the teacher is discussed further in the next two chapters.

method. The facts contained in these subjects, if rightly sought, can place a cold layer of reality like a snowdrift upon the pregnant soil of their phantasies, and the warmth and assurance which they bring will not kill but rather strengthen and nourish the growth of true imagination. Nor is it possible to predict when the girl or boy will be most in need of the expression of feeling or the confirmation of facts. He will also move as easily from one to the other as the very young child will change from ego-centric thought to highly reasoned arguments. Susan Isaacs has brought overwhelming evidence to show that the ability to reason begins very early and exists in the child at the same time as his phantasy modes of thought.<sup>5</sup> My evidence, though less scientifically and extensively derived, points, nevertheless, sharply to the fact of the co-existence of reason and phantasy in adolescence. The prose composition entitled *Thunder Rock* gives a very clear picture of this ambivalence, which I have submitted to the following close analysis.

THUNDER ROCK<sup>6</sup>

Note

1. The need for a safe phantasy retreat.

But also

2. The need to try out ideas on the intellectual plane; for example, the criticism of the adult, the press and the English. This is also shown in the repression of the fear of death. She wants to believe herself immortal, and yet there is a growing sense that this is not true. ('I have never yet heard a theory of death being unpleasant'—'According to a priest . . . etc.' That is: 'I want to be immortal and live for ever, but my reason begins to tell me this cannot be.')

Note again

1. The sense of being unique and different.

But also

2. The need to identify herself with the people in the film.

Again

1. A feeling of separation from and superiority to the parents.

<sup>5</sup> *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, p. 88 ff.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Seven, No. 11.

But also

2. The fear of ridicule and a sense of inferiority. ('When people are so scornful' — 'I wonder if you would laugh so loudly.')

Again

The sense of her biological and intellectual maturity is in conflict with her sociological dependence—a conflict which the present state of society imposes on every adolescent. ('I considered the money as being well spent, while my mother and father declared the film to be "a pack of nonsense"'.—'Being only fourteen,<sup>7</sup> I am not thought old enough to know my own mind.')

Again.

She expresses the need for consistency in the outside world as a protection against her own 'madness'. She cavils at the inconsistencies which she detects in the film.

Again

1. She claims the right to people an imaginary world with her own desires.

But also

2. She shows great interest in the *facts* about the lighthouse. ('I realise that I did not know', that is, how important to *know* as well as to *imagine*.) The reality need and the phantasy need are there *at the same time*.

This composition was written by a highly intelligent girl with perhaps an unusual degree of sophistication.<sup>8</sup> The capacity to detach pieces of herself and regard them in this apparently objective manner displays, too, a rather marked schizoid tendency, but for this reason it presents the ambivalent picture in its sharpest outline. Much of what she has said is, of course, a kind of masked expression. Had we been given a reproduction of the conversations she held with her imaginary companions we should have come closer to her real self. The garrulity of children of this age is as much a sign of repression as their inarticulateness. The value of this composition lies not in its revelation of individuality, which is negligible, but in its challenge to the teacher. The writer is, in fact, saying:

<sup>7</sup> Compare this annoyance at the parental attitude with the tolerance of the young child in Chapter Five, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Fourteen, p. 161.

'Catch me, if you can. The real me is neither one thing nor the other, but it is your job to find out what, as a whole, it is.' Adolescent conflict has long been acknowledged, but the nature of it is little understood. To regard this period as a kind of disease which must be gone through is to lose sight of the positive values which are there to be developed. The interpretation of this ambivalence becomes the teacher's peculiar task, so much the more because the child is so helpless herself within it.

## *II. Appreciation as a Form of Creative Activity*

For one thing, she has begun to take her own measure. She knows now much more clearly than she did where she is intellectually, as the steady divergence of mental differences takes place and a clearer picture is obtained of special abilities. The Junior School child thinks she can do anything; the adolescent knows that she cannot. Much more is desired, but much less is gained, and phantasy is necessary to compensate for this loss in reality. This self-measurement is one of the reasons why creation so often turns into appreciation. She may now think: 'Who am I to write a poem?' She may go further, if the teacher does not understand his job, and say: 'Who am I to like a poem?' The attitude often met with at this time, that poetry is silly, is another mask for the fear of feeling, and this will be assumed the more readily if the teacher attempts a vivisection of liking. Reasoning may be highly developed and penetrating, but feeling is overwhelming and often very diffused. The teacher who insists on the poet's meaning being understood with precision and objective understanding is running counter to the peculiar qualities of appreciation at this time. The state of being completely absorbed in feeling is rare in the majority of adults; so also is another power connected with adolescent appreciation, and that is the capacity to bestow feeling upon the object of admiration. These qualities appear in the adult generally only in the state of 'being in love', but the adolescent is permanently in this condition. His response to beauty is of that nature. Wordsworth connects the power of the mind 'to shed a light on what it sees' with his own seventeenth year. He calls it an 'auxiliar light'<sup>9</sup> and he associates it with the growth of social sympathy. To give scope to this 'creative sensibility' is not to sacrifice children, as is so

<sup>9</sup> See *The Prelude*, Book II, l. 369 ff.

often feared, to ceaseless mind-wandering and endless phantasy, but it is to provide them with an opportunity to realise their affinity with the universe. This subjective aspect of appreciation is the creative line which thought takes at this time. They may seem to misunderstand the poet's meaning because they are engaged in finding their own, or it may be, as in *Fishes*, that the child understands the poem unconsciously only because it expresses her own conflict. Here we must stop and meet the inevitable and very important questions which will arise. It will be asked; Is literature never to be studied for its own sake but always to be encumbered by child-meanings? Is no poem safe against the encroachments of the reader's personality? Have we any right to allow a child to seek her own satisfaction through the subjective distortions of other men's meanings? These questions are of the utmost importance to the teacher of English and they must be faced. The answer to them lies again in our further investigation of the child's ambivalence and in our understanding particularly of the reconciliation between reason and emotion, analysis and synthesis; for it is not merely a recognition of the co-existence of reason and emotion that is necessary, but the much more subtle grasp of how the mind works as a whole at this time, even when it may appear only to be acting in part.

### *III. Syncretistic understanding in Adolescence*

'The Pursuit of Precision destroys Certainty'.<sup>10</sup>

In this line Bertrand Russell cuts straight into the heart of this problem. One of the things the adolescent wants to do desperately is to make sure of things—to make sure of people and of meanings. The teacher, however, with a growing sense of the child's future and possibly with ambition for his examination success and with the fear that time is not on his side, takes this role of assurance upon himself and often denies it to the pupils. In catechising and seeking precise answers and information he snatches from them the very certitude they need so badly. I shall return to this argument when I have put more evidence before the reader of the peculiar nature of the synthesis of the adolescent's thought, in which we are not presented with a new phase of development to supplant an earlier one, but the earlier one has grown more complex and less

<sup>10</sup> *An Outline of Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell, p. 5.



embryonic in structure.<sup>11</sup> The desire to analyse, reason and make sure does not destroy the earlier desire to respond with the spontaneous interest of the whole personality, but the analytical phase develops *at the same time as* and within the still expanding need for synthetic thought.

Piaget in his *Institut Rousseau*<sup>12</sup> used to give a proverb test to boys from eleven to fifteen years. He would put in one place ten proverbs, and in another twelve sentences, ten of which expressed in a new form the same ideas; for example, 'Drunken once, will get drunk again' and 'It is difficult to break old habits.' The children were asked to read the proverb and find a sentence to fit it. This they were able to do in a large number of cases. He once applied this test to children of nine, ten and eleven as an experiment, and he found that few of these children understood the proverbs, but they thought they did and did not wait for an explanation, whilst they often found sentences which corresponded with the proverbs that they failed to understand. This leap of the mind to the right spot, which Piaget felt the young child was urged to make from his desire for justification at all costs, he describes as syncretistic understanding.<sup>13</sup> It was the existence of this syncretism of perception which enabled Decroly to teach children to read by letting them recognise words before letters—thus following, Piaget explains, the natural course of development from syncretism to a combination of analysis and synthesis, and not from analysis to synthesis only. Much of the evidence in the first section of this book reveals this wholeness of thought in young children, an unconscious grasp of meanings beyond them on the analytical plane; but the adolescent still responds to meaning on the unconscious level, as some of the material in this section has proved. However, a new power of comprehension does undoubtedly arrive at this time, when analysis and synthesis work together to produce intuition of a much more conscious and scientific kind. However, it is because of its complexity that this function is so often misconstrued by the teacher. The children over eleven understood the proverbs, or else they knew that they did not understand them, but that is not the same thing as being able to explain

<sup>11</sup> For a further discussion of this conception of development in children see Chapter Thirteen.

<sup>12</sup> For the detailed account of this experiment see *The Language and Thought of the Child*, p. 128 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Piaget's definition of this is given in Chapter Two, footnote 4.

the understanding. There are four processes involved: knowing and not knowing, knowing that you know or do not know, knowing what you know or do not know, and lastly being able to explain the knowledge or the lack of it. The pre-adolescent knows and she knows that she knows by feeling power and satisfaction from this knowledge. She does not always know what she knows—nor does she appear to want to. It is this very reserve of knowledge which gives a peculiar sense of achievement at this time, when

the soul  
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt  
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense  
 Of possible sublimity, whereto  
 With growing faculties she doth aspire  
 With faculties still growing, feeling still  
 That whatsoever point they gain, they yet  
 Have something to pursue.<sup>14</sup>

It is a 'howness' rather than a 'whatness' which matters to the young child. But the adolescent wants both—and particularly does he need the assurance of what he knows; but that does not mean, as educationists have, I think, too easily taken for granted, that she can explain what she is sure of—and because of our educational technique which demands these explanations, when she fails to give them not only does the teacher think she does not know, but the child herself begins to doubt and lose grip, thus: 'the pursuit of precision destroys certainty'. I will show this process at work.

Every English teacher is aware of the difficulties which boys and girls encounter in the understanding of Shakespeare's plays. When asked to paraphrase a given line, even if they have been given a certain amount of explanation, they are unlikely to respond satisfactorily. For this reason, the explanatory reading of the text has been largely abandoned in favour of the dramatic method of interpretation, and very wisely so. Children show that they understand the passage by their power to act and interpret it. However, because of the subjective aim of their acting, I do not think that they always receive the assurance that they have understood. A method of studying Shakespeare by which this comprehension is never brought to the text is as damaging to their confidence as is the method by which they are only catechised and rendered

<sup>14</sup> *The Prelude*, Book II, l. 315 ff.

ignorant. I think we must devise a technique again in line with the indirect method, and 'by indirections find directions out.'

For many years I taught *Julius Ceasar* in a form of twelve- to thirteen-year-olds, and *Macbeth* to the thirteen and fourteen-year-old group. Inspired by Piaget's experiment and wanting to give the children some confidence in their own understanding, I gave one or two homeworks (after the first reading of the play, during which the minimum of explanation was given) in which I asked the class to find passages which they felt to be applicable to the present times, and if they could to say why: thus using analogy as the means of indirect direction. These quotations varied enormously in the degree of penetration shown, as the following examples will demonstrate; but all of them proved without any doubt that a syncretistic understanding persists, and with it the ability to analyse and explain.

But this latter capacity functioned here not in an intellectual vacuum but in the context of the children's experience and world environments, and in a context where they could feel as well as think.

*Quotation*

1. The exhalations whizzing in the air  
Give so much light that I may read  
by them.

*J.C.*, II, i, ll. 44-45<sup>15</sup>

2. It is the bright day that brings forth  
the adder,  
And that craves wary walking.

*J.C.*, II, i, ll. 14, 15

3. The abuse of greatness is, when it  
disjoins  
Remorse from power.

*J.C.*, II, i, ll. 18, 19

4. First, Marcus Brutus, will I shake with  
you;  
Next, Caius Cassius, do I take your  
hand;  
Now Decius Brutus, yours; now yours  
Metellus;  
Yours, Cinna;—and, my valiant Casca,  
yours;—  
Though last, not least in love, yours,  
good Trebonius.

*J.C.*, III, i, ll. 185-189

*Explanation*

It gives a description of the nights now-a-days when the sky is illuminated by the gun-fire and bombs.

It could be applied to when the fine weather comes the raids begin.

This is like the dictators who think only of themselves and their power and do not care about the people.

This reminds me of Hitler trying to be friendly with the Balkan countries, but not really wanting to.

<sup>15</sup> These and the following quotations are taken from the text of the Oxford edition, 1931.

## THE RÉPRESSION STAGE OF ADOLESCENCE

- | <i>Quotation</i>  | <i>Explanation</i>  |
|---|---|
| <p>5. Come what come may,<br/>Time and the hour runs through the<br/>roughest day.<br/><i>Macbeth</i>, I, iii, ll. 146, 147</p>   | <p>This might be a message of encouragement to us that whatever happens we will go on through it.</p>   |
| <p>6. To offer up a weak, poor, innocent<br/>lamb,<br/>To appease an angry god.<br/><i>Macbeth</i>, IV, iii, 16, 17</p>   | <p>England and France gave Czechoslovakia to Hitler to try and stop a great European war.</p>   |
| <p>7. For certain friends that are both his<br/>and mine,<br/>Whose loves I may not drop, but wait<br/>his fall<br/>Who I myself struck down ; and thence<br/>it is<br/>That I to your assistance do make love ;<br/>Masking the business from the common<br/>eye<br/>For sundry weighty reasons.<br/><i>Macbeth</i>, III, i, ll. 121-126</p> | <p>In the play <i>Macbeth</i> speaks these words, asking the murderers to kill Banquo, but they must be almost the same as those Hitler says to confederates when he asks them to kill his friends in secret.</p> |
| <p>8. The labour we delight in physics pain<br/><i>Macbeth</i>, II, i, l. 50</p>  | <p>Referring to the women of to-day who worry about their relations in the Forces. They lose their thoughts in their work and therefore delight in it.</p>  |

In spite of the clumsiness of this last explanation, it is obvious that the child understands the word 'physics'. Some time after this homework was given back and I was revising the text for an examination, I asked her what the verb 'physics' meant in this line. I was met with a complete blank. After more pressure, she said she did not know. Then I reminded her that she had shown me that she did understand and referred her to her homework file. She then replied: 'Well, I do sort of know, but I can't explain.' This was not only followed by a discussion of Shakespeare's habit of turning nouns into verbs and vice-versa, but also of what it feels like to know something and know that you know it, but because you cannot explain it you have to behave as if you did not know it. Knowledge and ignorance, that is, are often parts of the same whole. The child must often express ignorance to ensure knowledge. But the teacher, instead of building on certitude and having faith in this syncretistic power of the mind, too often makes it his special task to reveal and probe ignorance. This constant questioning before knowledge has

had time to grow sure of itself is one of the most destructive processes in the whole educational field, in which we are seen:

Reflecting a pocket torch of observation  
Upon each other's opacity.<sup>16</sup>

The lesson which I learnt from this exercise year after year was that we must not judge children's comprehension by their ability to find the right answer at once, nor must we conclude that they have lost the synthetic power of imaginative and intuitive thought because owing to the complexity of its nature they cannot be sure of its validity. We could, I think, devise other indirect methods of reaching the certainty of what they know so that they themselves become aware of it.<sup>17</sup> We might reverse the method used in the young child's dramatisation, and allow her to take the dramatist's finished product rather than his source, and turn that into modern idiomatic English. An adolescent's reconstruction of *Romeo and Juliet* might be most valuable to her and illuminating to us.

Here we stop again, because our critics are ready to cry out once more at the desecration of great masterpieces in this way, and they have not yet been given their answer, though I believe, the material for it is now before us. What are the discordant opposites, constituents of this ambivalence, which the teacher has to reconcile? Briefly, a need for the assurance of facts and the assurance that the child is sure of them—two different things; this, on the one hand, and on the other the need to receive and absorb feeling from other people and from things, and also the desire to make a gift of love and a contribution towards beauty. Both her arrogance and her humility are equally engaged in these needs. It becomes important, therefore, to find contexts in which she can both feel and know at the same time. Because she interprets a poem through her own feeling reaction, we cannot assume that she does not also understand more than she can explain of the poet's meaning. The more she is given the sanction to bring her own interpretation, the closer will she finally reach this meaning. This was proved to be equally true of the young child's unconscious understanding of literature—and it went further back still. For we saw that the more infants were allowed free

<sup>16</sup> See the methods described in Chapter Two.

<sup>17</sup> The dramatic method is one of these, but less successful for the adolescent than it is for the pre-adolescent.

play for their phantasy, the more safely could they explore the world of reality.<sup>18</sup> Life is a constant rhythm of weanings. The final aim of the mother with the baby at the breast is that he shall be able to take solid food; the final aim of the nursery school teacher who allows for the child's phantasy play is that he shall be able to act the plays of others; the final aim of the teacher who encourages the dramatisation of stories is that Shakespeare shall be more fundamentally appreciated; the final aim of the teacher who gives scope for original composition in prose and verse is that ultimately a reconciliation of form and meaning shall take place; the final aim of the teaching of poetry appreciation is that the child shall reach a reconciliation of subjective and objective interpretation. The immediate aim in all these instances is that the child shall grow and wax strong. Those final aims, we have gradually come to recognise, are, on the whole outside the scope of children under sixteen. I believe that they begin to come into view in the Sixth Form. This submission of personal needs to the imperative of reality, of personal meaning to objective understanding, is the whole work of education. But it cannot be hurried, any more than the child can be taken too soon from the breast or the bottle. We cannot force a child to understand a poem analytically, for without that 'auxiliar light' of her 'creative sensibility' all appreciation of the arts is so much critical abstraction. The fact that a great deal of adult appreciation of the arts is under-sublimated and regressive, or over-sublimated and over-intellectualised, cannot be laid as a charge against school education entirely; rather it is a pointer to the need for the furtherance of education throughout adult life.<sup>19</sup>

Is it now clear that what is generally called the repression stage of adolescence is no static condition of lost or hidden powers, is in fact not a repression stage in the psychological

<sup>18</sup> Chapter One, p. 26.

See *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, Susan Isaacs: 'Mental alertness and an active interest in objects are very dependent upon freedom from anxiety and inner tension.' Make-believe play, she asserts, helps to allay anxiety 'by giving external body and form to the phantastic wishes and guilt of infancy,' p. 104.

<sup>19</sup> My own work in an Emergency Training College has brought this home to me with great force; but the subject needs another chapter at least to do it justice and it is outside the scope of this enquiry. The concept of 'maturity' needs as much analysis as that of adolescence, latency and infancy.

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sense,<sup>20</sup> but a dynamic, highly potential unity of reason and emotion, analysis and synthesis? The teacher's responsibility is never to lose faith in this imaginative synthetic power, even when it appears to go underground. He will be rewarded, from time to time, if he leaves the way open between feeling thought and expression, with such compositions as we have been studying in these chapters and probably much more inspiring ones, passages that

with a livelier green  
Betray the secret of their silent course.

<sup>20</sup> The word is used in the psychological sense as describing a defence mechanism the function of which is to guard the mind from painful experiences and to prevent certain mental processes from coming into consciousness.

*Section Three*

RELATIONSHIP

The Teacher's Contribution  
to Child Expression



‘The master remains the model for the teacher. For if the educator of our day has to act consciously he must nevertheless do it “as though he did not”. That raising of the finger, that questioning glance, are his genuine doing. Through him the selection of the effective world reaches the pupil. He fails the recipient when he presents this selection to him with a gesture of interference. It must be concentrated in him; and doing out of concentration has the appearance of rest. Interference divides the soul in his care into an obedient part and a rebellious part. But a hidden influence proceeding from his integrity has an integrating force.

‘The world has its influence as nature and as society on the child. He is educated by the elements, by air and light and the life of plants and animals, and he is *educated by relationships*. The true educator represents both; but he must be to the child as one of the elements.’

Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*.

No. III: *Education*, p. 90.

‘Now the delicate, almost imperceptible and yet important influence begins—that of criticism and instruction. The children encounter a scale of values that, however unacademic it may be, is quite constant, a knowledge of good and evil that, however individualistic it may be, is quite unambiguous. The more academic this scale of values, and the more individualistic this knowledge, the more deeply do the children experience the encounter. In the former instance the preliminary declaration of what alone was right made for resignation and rebellion; but in the latter, where the pupil gains the realisation only after he has ventured far out on the way to his achievement, his heart is drawn to reverence for the form, and educated.

‘This almost imperceptible, most delicate approach, the raising of a finger, perhaps, or a questioning glance, is *the other half* of what happens in education. Modern educational theory, which is characterised by tendencies to freedom, misunderstands the meaning of *this other half*, just as the old theory, which was characterised by the habit of authority, misunderstood the meaning of the first half.’

Martin Buber, *Ibid*.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE PRINCIPLES OF THE INDIRECT METHOD

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‘By indirections find directions out.’

*Hamlet*, Act. II, sc. i.

#### *I. The Principle of Indirection*

‘For if the educator of our day has to act consciously he must nevertheless do it “as though he did not”.’

IT WAS STATED in the introduction that the technique to be recommended in these chapters was one of ‘knowing and yet appearing not to know, of consciousness in unconsciousness, action in non-action.’<sup>1</sup> It is a doctrine which might seem to advocate the adoption of Eastern ways of thought; but it is not the purpose of this book to suggest any such thing. It is no doubt true, as Jung says, that in the West we have lost the art of letting things happen in the psyche,<sup>2</sup> of ‘leaving the simple growth of the psychic processes in peace’<sup>3</sup>; but the work of education goes further than this, though it should include it. We are now in a position to examine more closely the role the educator plays in relation to the psychic processes at work in the child.

There is a wealth of evidence in the foregoing chapters proving that a child needs expression for this world of inner reality; that in fact the lines from Wordsworth which prefaced Section One are an accurate description of the haunting power of this hidden life. The shy spirit in the heart of every child, which remains, too, as the child in every adult, is this unconscious striving for release from the ‘hiding-places ten years deep’. When she reads of the jealousy between the two sisters in the old ballad, the friendships and enmities of Achilles, the

<sup>1</sup> Introduction, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Integration of the Personality*: ‘One must be able to “let things happen”. I have learnt from the East what it means by the phrase “wu wei”, namely, not doing—letting be; which is quite different from doing nothing.’ Pp. 31, 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Secret of the Golden Flower*, p. 90.

reaction of a man to a snake, she recognises the familiar face of her own repressed conflicts, which will trouble her until the ghost be laid, and the debt be paid in some form of creative effort. This is where the teacher helps when he provides clay, sand, toys, paint, pencil, ink and paper, and the means for dramatisation. But to provide tools is only one part of his work. His help is needed in reaching these instinctive forces of the personality; and further in bringing the child into touch with the past and future of the ages, with what Jung called 'the collective unconscious' and Wordsworth 'the ghostly language of the ancient earth'. In these chapters we have often caught her listening to the admonitions from 'the world around the corner', have seen the paw appear under the door and the dark passage of unconscious desire find illumination in expression; whilst we may have noticed, on several occasions, how finely attuned she is to the cosmic influences which surround her, to 'the wind's talk in the dry holly tree', 'the inclination of the moon'.<sup>4</sup>

The sea was at the end of our road, and, of course I was Fritha.<sup>5</sup>

He wanted to hurt anybody who came near him, but it was death really and he just would not understand that.<sup>6</sup>

He thought very well of his father's spear; that is why he used it when he was angry.<sup>7</sup>

They have had their day, but never again will they be able to tantalise as they dart among the cool water lilies on a hot July afternoon.<sup>8</sup>

He wonders at the meaning of that breeze  
That rustled through his hand, and through the trees  
To rustle to the end, he knows not where.<sup>9</sup>

But, as T. S. Eliot points out,<sup>10</sup> these influences are not brought about by detailed preparation and microscopic examination of knowledge; but by a means more indirect. And yet the teacher's function is to do more than stand by and watch 'objectively the development of any fragment of

<sup>4</sup> See passage from T. S. Eliot prefacing Section Two.

<sup>5</sup> Page 38.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Page 79.

<sup>9</sup> Page 80.

<sup>10</sup> See above, footnote 4.

fantasy'.<sup>11</sup> The letter from Keats<sup>12</sup> helped us to some extent to understand the indirect, creative approach; and there is, of course, a whole poetic and philosophic literature enshrining it.<sup>13</sup> But the philosopher Martin Buber has perhaps gone the furthest in defining these qualities as they apply to the teacher.<sup>14</sup> I have chosen two passages as a preface to this section which seem to me to describe most significantly the task of the teacher, though selection from such rich wisdom was not easy. Buber sees this task as threefold: it is selective, integrative, and one of relationship. To understand the first two aspects it is necessary first to grasp the nature of the third.

## II. *The Principle of Relationship*

'He is educated by relationships'.

Buber distinguishes two principles of relationship which he calls the authority principle and the eros principle. Both have their counterparts in some aspects of the old and new education. The old educator with 'the will to power' accepts traditional values and imposes them with a paternal will upon his pupils.<sup>15</sup> This, he says, is the danger too of a certain kind of new educator who has replaced the master, for the will to educate can so soon degenerate into arbitrariness, and 'the educator may carry out his influence from himself and his idea of the pupil, not from the pupil's own reality.'<sup>16</sup> Another type of educator learns to love his pupil and inclines towards his wishes and desires. This is the eros principle—and is no more sound than the authority principle. All love involves choice, choice is made from inclination, and the teacher cannot choose his pupil in this sense. 'The man who is loving in eros chooses the beloved, the modern educator finds his pupil there before him.'<sup>17</sup> Further, love pre-supposes the element of 'inclusion'. This inclusion is

<sup>11</sup> Jung, *Secret of the Golden Flower*, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> Appendix II.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Thirteen, p. 153, 154.

<sup>14</sup> In a lecture delivered at Heidelberg in August 1925 on 'The development of the creative powers in the child', now republished in *Between Man and Man* by Kegan Paul. It was Herbert Read who first drew attention to Buber's significance for educationists. Op. cit., Chapter IV on 'The Teacher'.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 93. I have in this chapter used the masculine pronoun for the child as I am mainly reproducing Buber's thought.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

the mutual experiencing of one person in another. 'But however intense the mutuality of giving and taking with which the teacher is bound to his pupil, inclusion cannot be mutual in this case. He experiences his pupil's being educated, but the pupil cannot experience the educating of the educator. . . . In the moment when the pupil is able to throw himself across and experience from over there, the educative relation would be burst asunder, or change into friendship.'<sup>18</sup>

What then is the true teacher-child relationship if it is not one of 'authority' or 'love' in these two senses? The teacher's function is simply to be there in a position of trust. 'Trust, trust in the world, because this human being exists—that is the most inward achievement of the relation in education.'<sup>19</sup> Once this relationship is set up then his further work of selecting and integrating can take place.

This conception of the relationship in education seems to me extremely true and valuable. Children cannot and should not be expected to know what it is like to be a teacher, though they will sometimes throw feelers across in sayings such as 'It must be funny being a teacher', 'I don't think I should like to be you', or 'I don't think teachers ought to use words like that' (this when I used some of their slang expressions). They expect our two worlds to be separate. However, we on the other hand must know what it is like to be a child, should imagine that life intensely, and should, as Homer Lane put it, always 'be on his side'. We may be to the child something quite other than what we are: the child must be to us what he is in as whole a way as we are capable of understanding him.

But let us be honest; this situation is one of infinite subtlety and delicacy. We are human beings, and we shall incline to some children more than to others as we incline more to some people; but once this personal equation is set up, once we give the child access to our genuine personalities and include him in them, then it is as Buber says, the relation of education has changed to one of friendship. This is bound sometimes to occur, but whenever it does one's power to educate the child to the full is lessened rather than increased. It may be that we can educate ourselves, for there comes a time, in late adolescence generally, when the teacher will dwindle before the growing girl or boy and when both will recognise that education has become in T. S. Eliot's phrase 'a common pursuit of liber-

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 100, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

ation'. But even in adult life whenever we are truly conscious of being educated there arises an inequality in the situation. We have for a time humbled ourselves before the master. Surely, too, it works the other way. In most love relationships and friendships there are moments when the mutual inclusive situation gives way to one of teaching and being taught; but whenever one is predominant the influence of the other is lessened. The relation of teacher and child is then in this sense one-sided. It is also the job of the teacher to decide when he has become unnecessary, and is it not one of the most difficult things in any human relationship to know when to go away, though it is easier for the teacher than for the parent? If the teacher works as an integrative force the child's growth will within itself determine these moments of separation. But before he can integrate, he must select.

### *III. Principle of Selection*

'Through him the selection of the effective world reaches the pupil.'

Teaching is really a three-sided relationship; for the teacher has to select his material with an equal regard for its integrity and the nature of the child's interests. But to effect this fusion, the teacher must be in constant touch not only with his material as a source for the child, but also as a means for his own education—though obviously it need not be the same matter. The peculiar nature of this relationship between teacher, child and knowledge, which is—or should be—what we mean by a syllabus, will be dealt with in a moment, but here I want to lay great stress upon the importance to the teacher of his continually returning to his sources of inspiration, if he is to make the right selection for the child. The lessening of teachers' holidays is only one sign of official blindness to this necessity, and can only result in a gradual shrinkage of the intellectual stature of the nation. The integration which the teacher brings to his work does not arise by any miraculous power. It is the result of knowledge and hard work, though of course these must be skilfully used. One without the other is useless in the educator. The term 'academic' is in these days too easily scorned. Our best academies of learning have always been places where men learnt to live as a whole. University education is not open to all, but I am convinced that no one is educated unless he has

at some time or other sat at the feet of some Gamaliel; some master who, if only in a small measure, combined within his personality respect for scholarship and respect for life—'the master remains the model for the teacher'. The teacher should be constantly in touch with someone greater than himself, that he himself may be to the child something of a master.

In the teacher learning and life must be concentrated; and 'doing out of concentration has the appearance of rest'. Watch a teacher at work. Is he always disputing, arguing, making plans and charts, following the latest scheme, chanting the newest slogans, 'buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at'?<sup>20</sup> Is the school a hubbub of activity, of visual aids, of shows and exhibitions, and no more? I would then suspect that education takes only a second place if as well as all these outward signs there is not also in the library, the classroom, the play-ground, the studio and the laboratory, the child and the teacher together whispering results to each other. Teachers may sometimes quite rightly claim that their job is not to be dealing out milk, counting dinner money and presiding over dinner tables. But let them take care. These are tasks which children respect. Moreover, they often wait for these moments when a teacher seems at once near and safely apart to pour out their confidences. The child walking with the teacher in a playground of screaming children often finds he can open-up, whereas in the classroom he was struck dumb. Parents as well as teachers are often exasperated by this habit and exclaim: 'Why do you always wait until I'm busy to tell me things like this?' The child in these situations is reacting to a hidden integrity within the teacher. He would never so approach anyone he did not trust.

#### *IV. Principle of Integration*

'A hidden influence proceeding from his integrity has an integrating force.'

The integrating force of the teacher has a unique quality, just as his relationship is also of a particular kind. To a large extent it depends upon a knowledge of when, as his selective power was a knowledge of what; when to ask a question and when not to, when to answer one, when to give information,

<sup>20</sup> See letter from Keats to Reynolds republished in Appendix I, No. 2.

when to suggest, when to correct, when to encourage—and even when to discourage. There is a time for everything in the teacher's art. And this timing depends upon the age and maturation of the child, his intelligence, his special abilities, and also his moods and dispositions.<sup>21</sup> But the moment for the teacher to act towards a child can only be rightly determined from within the relationship which exists between them; for no integrative action takes place outside relationship; but this is not mutually determined as in the eros situation, but determined by the teacher. In this way we can see that integrative education is no passive, detached and objective attitude of mind: the teacher is an integral part of the lesson. He must never forget that. For what integrates is what grows up in the course of a lesson between the pupil and the teacher and the material. This betweenness is the quality that matters, that educates. We all recognise betweenness in everyday life as a state of existence which belongs neither to one thing nor another but has its own significance—is in fact, as Buber pointed out, a kind of new dimension. When we say 'What is between them?', 'What has come between them?', we are recognising this state of being. In fact, the latter remark is a complex elliptical statement meaning: 'What has come to the something that had grown up between them to destroy the betweenness between them?' In teaching, 'betweenness' is the only interference which is truly creative. 'A real lesson (that is, neither a routine repetition nor a lesson whose findings the teacher knows before he starts, but one which develops in mutual surprises)' . . . 'in this,' Buber writes, 'what is essential does not take place in each of the participants or in a neutral world which includes the two and all other things; but it takes place between them in the most precise sense, as it were in a dimension which is accessible only to them both.'<sup>22</sup>

This betweenness, Buber goes on to explain, has no shape because 'it is ever and again re-constituted in accordance with men's meetings with one another.'<sup>23</sup> Every teacher knows this. No two lessons can ever be the same as no two encounters can; no lesson ever takes place as it was planned as no meeting

<sup>21</sup> I was interested to read in *The Next Development in Man*, by L. L. Whyte, the following definition of integration: 'integration means proper timing, i.e. timing so that characteristic form is maintained and developed. Complete integration is perfect timing,' p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> *What is Man?* 1938, republished in *Between Man and Man*, p. 204.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.



does. And yet although these mutual surprises occur they are nevertheless to a large extent anticipated by the teacher, even sometimes engineered. Teaching belongs to art; friendship and loving to life. Here, then, is a most delicate and subtle three-cornered relationship which is at the same time one-sided in its conscious purposive direction. Let us watch it at work.

### *V. The Artistry of a Lesson*

Let us imagine a class of children of fourteen plus. The teacher's purpose is to introduce for the first time, shall we say, Coleridge's *Christabel*. Beyond that it is not clearly defined. He knows they will respond to the thriller element in the poem—to the incantation of the rhythm—to an unfolding story; he knows that the suggestive power of the poetry will do more; but what is not easy to predict. Now he begins to read and his attention is focused upon Coleridge and his meanings. When he comes to lines such as those which conclude Part II and which express so poignantly the death instinct in life of the man who

Must needs express his love's excess  
With words of unmeant bitterness

the teacher knows how far beyond the conscious understanding of the child they are. He should read them with his own experience to the fore; and the weight of this bitter-sweet response will be part of that integrative integrity which is the educating force; and this will reach to the unconscious understanding in the child's mind, who as an infant has not been innocent of these destructive feelings. But all these possible meanings for the child should be held by the teacher in a kind of contrapuntal position. His mind should dwell as he reads with imaginative intensity upon what Coleridge meant, and means to him. This concentration is what will influence the child, this scale of values, 'this quite unambiguous meaning'. Safe within this integrity he will allow himself to grow to the poem, to spread within it his own feeling and dawning understanding. It is a safety like that of the teacher counting the dinner money. Had the teacher given one false glance as much as to say: 'Isn't this a thrilling poem—aren't we enjoying it together?' introducing that talking, thinking down attitude which so many teachers adopt, then something would have been lost from

the betweenness—as lost as if the teacher had said: ‘This means this, learn it.’ I always suspect the teacher who uses such phrases as ‘Children love it’, ‘We’ve had a lovely time together’, ‘It’s such fun for both of us’, as not understanding the essential quality of this betweenness. For as soon as we come too far across to the child and sacrifice our meanings and the poet’s meanings, then he will become isolated and embarrassed. For never for one moment does the child imagine that what he is getting from the poem is what the teacher is understanding. His position is very much like that of the infant who finds phantasy play easier if the mother or teacher is doing her own jobs near by. And yet all those contrapuntal meanings are playing a very important part in the betweenness which is developing. For the teacher does not read the poem as if to a group of equals. He is acting towards the child with a kind of double self. Every teacher knows of these ripples of understanding, misunderstanding and lack of understanding which will flow across a class on these occasions. They should be apprehended but never be allowed to break up the whole which is between the teacher and the poem.<sup>24</sup> Now if this operation is perfectly balanced, a reconciliation will take place which is of the imaginative kind Coleridge defined; and all the discordant opposites which so many meanings produce will be composed into something which is creative for teacher and child alike. It is indeed a new dimension. When the strength of the learner is sufficient, his confidence gained, he will take the poem to himself and study it for its own sake; thus the teacher gradually becomes unnecessary. Another weaning process has taken place. So fine, however, is this balance, this action in non-action, that it is not surprising that it often fails. It can fail for many reasons; the selection of material may have

<sup>24</sup> I think it was this peculiar and special kind of apartness in the teacher which John Cowper Powys admired in a Classics Master at Sherborne when one day he was sent to his room for correction and was given instead a disquisition on a nice point of Greek syntax: ‘what it was I have forgotten; and I’m sure I didn’t comprehend a word of what he said; but the great point was that *it was said to himself* rather than to me; and the effect of it was to make me feel that a Greek Grammar was a veritable *windrow* between sandy shore and infinite sea, strewn with magical treasures-trove, coral and starfish and every sort of mother-of-pearl shell.

‘What richly arrests and irresistibly fascinates a young person in an old person is a peep into a treasure-cave of mystery.’ *The Art of Growing Old*, p. 141.

been bad; or the timing, it was perhaps introduced at the wrong moment; the teacher may not have understood it thoroughly herself; she may have given in to the child's meanings and compromised the whole situation; she may not have accepted as part of the artistic whole the discordant elements of not liking, sometimes of positive hostility. The submissive and rebellious components are parts of one whole and can be reconciled within the concentrative integrity of the teacher's understanding.<sup>25</sup> For we must 'be to the child as one of the elements'.

In other words the teacher makes it *safe* through the authority of his integrity for the child to think and feel. There can be no sincere expression where there is fear. The relation between this form of authority and the authority of form is a very interesting one. The teacher's integrity stands to the child's creativeness in much the same relation as the form of a work of art stands to the meanings within it.

#### VI. *The Principle of Form*

'His heart is drawn to reverence for the form, and educated.'

The threefold relationship is, however, more complex even than this. It is not only that the child is brought to accept the forms of other men's expressions through the mediation and integrity of the teacher, but also that there is in literature itself, if selection is well made, a quality which feeds and nourishes him. This we have witnessed over and over again in these chapters. It was the power of Homer and Malory that reached the deepest levels of understanding in the child: the suggestive force of Lawrence and the Chinese poet that stirred her own responses; though none of this would have happened had the teacher not authorised it in the way we have shown above. The teacher's creed was: 'Write your play: I believe in Homer. Write your poems: I believe in Shakespeare. Write your fantasy: I believe in D. H. Lawrence', and so on. Once the child is set free in this way she is of course free to rebel and dislike the poem as well as to submit to it and accept it. Both attitudes should be met with equal grace.

This relation between authority and freedom is another aspect of the union between form and meaning in literature. It is related also to the influence of rhythm and metre in poetry. This is a

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter Thirteen, p. 152.

vast subject and cannot be entered upon here, but only hinted at. The forms of verse often enable us to accept the new and startling as the truth we have always known. Young children like to take their poetry with a sing-song beat, and the adolescent too is inclined to fight shy of the freedom of *vers-libre* unless the teacher introduces it and substitutes for the authority of form, the sanction of his authority.

If then the teacher is the authority who makes it safe to say what you really want to say, and not the authority who dictates what it is you ought to say,<sup>26</sup> it follows that the way expression is received by the teacher becomes yet another aspect of the relation in education. A child does not feel free to express himself unless he feels that his expression will be protected. On the other hand, there comes a point when correction and instruction are necessary parts of this very safeguard. For a child not only wants to say what he means; he wants to say it well. No pupil believes in the integrity of a teacher who never gives back his work and who never corrects it. There is a danger, as Buber wrote, that 'modern educational theory, which is characterised by tendencies to freedom' should misunderstand the meaning of 'this other half' of the teacher's job. It is the purpose of the next chapter to investigate this further.

<sup>26</sup> It was of course this second use of the word authority which Buber followed in his authority principle.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### EVALUATION AND CORRECTION OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION

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‘Now the delicate, almost imperceptible and yet important influence begins—that of criticism and instruction.’

#### *I. The Variability of Standard and Judgment*

I WILL BEGIN by putting the subject in a concrete form. The reader is asked to study the following composition written by a girl of fourteen years in an examination paper which also contained a grammar question.

#### TENNIS

It was raining a little and the crowd at the door seemed very upset. They were all in the white shorts talking and laughing but the rain had just started, The door was closed and you could hear them saying ‘O that rain is a nuisance’, another, ‘it always comes on the wrong day’ ‘and when we don’t want it, why could’ent it come tomorrow’ ‘when I am having a lovely music lesson’ ‘Hm, Hm.’ A rather jolly looking girl of the school that has invited us for the the tennis tournament, this girl suddenly says rain rain go away come on Mothers washing day. There is a roar of laughter, There are now and then an eager crowd of faces popping outside the door to see if the rain had stopped, ‘The rain has stopped’ someone says and out they all rush. it has not been raining hard so it is not to damp to play. The umpires go up on their high stands and the tournament girls go all round the crowd of audience perhaps there are some old girls of the school but they have no time to talk, There is just a bundle of clothes put quickly onto the poor audience ‘Would you mind minding my coat please’ ‘O here is my purse take it please.’ The girls are in their places the game has started, The ball-boys are running picking up the balls, The umpire is telling a new ball boy that she must not run in and pick up the balls when the game has started, There is the ting of raquets bang, crash, whollop. bang, the girls hair is flying about they get so agitated. Then umpires voices ring saying ‘15 love,’ they all stand quite still while the server serves. then the game goes on, The score is now Advantage to C.— Bang, crash, then there is a ring of voices come on C.— But the

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Umpire then says 'Duce'<sup>1</sup> Then there is an 'Oooh, tut, tut', But it comes advantage to S.—, S.— girls are shouting, They lost it then Advantage to C.— The ball-boys are ever so excited they even forget to pick up the balls but the Umpire soon reminds them Hooray Hooray shoul the audience C.—'s game says the Umpire then the is a final shout. Hooray Hooray, C.— game this is how the game goes on The result is 4 sets to C.— 1 to S.— then there is a shaking of hands with the C.— girls and they go across the lawn into tea they have a jolly good tea but outside they see the anxious faces of the ball boys trying to say to one of the girls leave us some bring us a piece, but the ball boys have to wait till afterwards before them can get some tea, but they wait with patience and the girls all come out. The ball boys are rather shy at first but a prefect calls them in and they go in and have a jolly good tea of what is left over, and they then go out again to finish their job as ball boying because the match has not finished yet they play till after six So the game goes on, and to final score is 8 games to C.— six to S.— then the S.— girls after shaking hands go off with their mistress into the coach that is waiting outside and they all troop in raquets, cases, and the worst thing is that the poor driver does not get anything to eat, he has been waiting out there but perhaps he went for a walk round he may have bought a cake or two and all the S.— girls get into the coach there is a waving of hands and some thank-you-very-muchs, it is ever so kind of you and the S.— girls drive off tired but happy.

What did I do? I had of course about thirty compositions and grammar exercises to correct, and as is usual I probably had one evening in which to do them. A percentage had to be reached. As might be expected, this girl's grammar was very poor. Under these conditions correction and marking under headings such as punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, vocabulary, etc., is much easier than evaluation of the whole as an original work. So I began to correct with a view to such marking, but I gave up defeated half-way through. My reaction against the badly written page was very strong. I began to read it aloud to make sense of it and not until then did I realise that here was a good piece of impressionistic writing, but how good I did not know until afterwards, when I had time to study it. I heaped on marks to bring it within the second class, and this was, I think, the only time that this child's work reached that standard in English.<sup>2</sup>

I spoke in Chapter Eight of the impossibility of describing

<sup>1</sup> This was written in 1938.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Fourteen, p. 162.

faithfully any event or performance without the unifying power of imagination. How strongly this is borne out here where Coleridge's laws can be seen once more at work! There is diffused throughout 'a tone and spirit of unity'. 'The concrete and the general', 'the individual and the representative' are perfectly reconciled. Note the close attention to detail, the position and behaviour of players, spectators, ball-boys and umpires. The scores are recorded, and one is not allowed to take one's eye off the ball for long. And yet all these facts are fused together into one vivid whole, partly by a wide appeal to the senses, but chiefly through the portrayal of the human feelings of all the sharers in the game; impatience at the weather, pity for the driver, the humility of the ball-boys, the superiority of the prefects—so that all participants in all school matches are represented in this one event. And every time one reads the account one is struck by the novelty and freshness which have been given to the old and familiar topic. We soon realise that the writer is closely identified with the ball-boys, yet our sympathies are nevertheless widely engaged, and even our reaction to the naïvety of the child is subordinated to our general admiration for the vitality of the description.

We can see, too, if we analyse the style, that most of its triumphs are scored from what are often regarded as weaknesses. The rain occupies a whole page of the examination paper as it certainly looms largely in the mind of a schoolgirl on the day of a match. It is not out of proportion to the imaginative whole. The neglect of punctuation and the running on of phrases and sentences gives the effect of breathless continuity of movement. Her repetitions are particularly effective. 'The game goes on' recurs like a gong beating us to attention; and what skilful use of cognate words: 'Would you mind minding?', 'the server serves'. There is, in fact, as was pointed out to me at the time by one of my colleagues, a strong resemblance between this and the style of Gertrude Stein's writing. What Gertrude Stein has achieved by conscious effort, this child has done unconsciously. How familiar this argument has become!

Now had I marked this answer on the standard of accuracy and good sentence structure which was in my mind when I set it, the girl would have failed. The question arises at once: Ought the teacher to hold standards at all apart from the work, and should not every composition be judged by the standard which it itself produces? Should his standards be extrinsic and objective, or intrinsic and subjective?

## EVALUATION AND CORRECTION OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION

First of all let it be stated that there can be no reliable standardised assessment of any work of original composition. Many experiments have been made submitting written exercises to a number of examiners and all of them reveal the amazing variability within the marking.<sup>3</sup> A master in a well-known public school sent me the results of such an experiment made there recently. Eight short compositions were given to eight examiners, all masters of the school, who were asked to mark them out of a maximum of 20. He found that the percentage of possible marks awarded ranged between 61 and 45; that the highest mark awarded by any marker, 95 per cent, was 40 per cent better than the lowest mark awarded for the same essay, and that the essay which was least approved, which obtained an aggregate mark of 34 per cent, showed a 40 per cent variation between markers. The essay which approximated most nearly to *Tennis* in freedom and individuality of treatment was awarded the widest range of marks and was, the experimenter said, 'the most significant thing in this small enquiry'. The marks for this ranged as follows:

Examiners	..	..	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Marks out of 20	..	13	9	15	5	7	14	6	13	

The reader can make his own experiment by submitting *Tennis* or any other composition to a similar treatment. The results will no doubt be very much the same.

We are now led to enquire what are the variables in the minds of examiners to make their marks so divergent; what, in fact, we mean by a standard of composition. It is built up, we know, upon a knowledge and practice of good writing. This is something, we are safe in assuming, which belonged to all these assessors. The differences in their intellectual equipment could not account for such different judgments. We might then seek further and say that the masters had different ideas of what could be expected of a boy at a certain age, and of what he was being educated to do. Examiner C was looking for freshness and spontaneity and a certain freedom of expression, and so he was prepared to acknowledge this. Examiner D was looking for technical skill and substance of thought, which this essay lacked. He was not prepared to sacrifice these. But still one cannot account for such variations in standards of judgment

<sup>3</sup> See *The Marks of Examiners*, by Sir Philip Hartley and E. C. Rhodes; also *An Examination of Examinations*, by the same authors.



solely on these levels. We cannot correct and evaluate anybody else's expression without expressing ourselves in doing it. It is as much a teacher's function to try to understand as far as he is able the motives and compulsions behind his assessments as it is for him to know what makes a good style. Children show their awareness of the element of subjectivity in a teacher's marking, even if they do not realise the extent of it, in such remarks as: 'So and so's a beast', though they may add 'a just beast'; 'So and so's pretty mean with his marks'; 'So and so never tells you whether you are good or bad'; 'I've got a good mark; but it doesn't mean much from so and so'. I think on the whole teachers are more taken in than children are, for from years of autocracy we become infallible to ourselves.

## *II. The Teacher's Attitude to Good and Bad Work*

We saw in the above experiment that although the examiners could not be reacting to the children themselves, as they did not know the boys, nevertheless where individuality showed up most clearly the marking was most affected. Further, the experimenter remarked on the whole result that 'while there was fair agreement over the average performance, there was wide disagreement over how to evaluate in terms of marks what was good in the best and bad in the worst'. This is not at all surprising, because it is in our reaction to good and bad that we most easily reveal our own unconscious attitudes. The teacher who suffers from a compulsive desire for the perfect page is in something of the same position as the mother who must have a good child at all costs. I have been amazed at the large number of schools which do not allow the children to cross out or to alter and which insist on all work being copied out neatly. In these demands the educators are displaying their own unconscious fears of destruction, and it is of course well known how many perfectionist standards are frequently rationalisations for a deep sense of weakness and inadequacy. Equally well of course the teacher who sets no standards, but who will accept any kind of work and will deal out praise indiscriminately, may be suffering from such an excessive need for children's affection and esteem that he dare not give the correction that is necessary. For a child who receives no correction or blame when it is due is deprived of a safe repository for his own destructive feelings; blame and correction can be so admin-

istered that children feel the creative will of the teacher as clearly as they do from praise rightly given.

These unconscious reactions to good and bad are made by the children as well, of course. There is the child who cannot, dare not in fact, make a mistake, and the one who always presents a grubby, dirty, inaccurate piece of work. Much will depend upon which child meets which teacher, and there is something to be said for the subject rather than the class teacher after infancy, for in this respect children will have a better deal, if they are met by several types of personality among whom there will be one at least to accept their work along their own lines. Teachers will again vary in their judgments according to their age, sex and experience. Every staff should, I believe, be mixed to some extent and consist of as wide an age range as possible.

However, if the teacher is himself a balanced, whole personality, aware of his prejudice and bias, then he should be able to meet all children alike with the same imaginative will. But the teacher who is a dualist at heart, and to whom good and bad are separate states always to be kept apart,<sup>4</sup> such a one will divide the will of the child in his care so that she is afraid to accept herself as she is and will always be striving, throughout life maybe, to discover the good child which the mother wanted and never found, to produce the perfect page which always fell short of the teacher's standards. I have frequently heard adult students who had quite a flair for expression in writing say that they could never do essays at school, which probably meant that they had failed one particular teacher. A teacher on the other hand who holds a unitary, imaginative view of life, who accepts good and bad in himself and in the child as parts of one whole, such a teacher will reconcile the will of the child and bring her gradually to believe in herself as she is and not as she ought to be, judged by standards which are unrelated to her own deepest needs.

### *III. The Value of the Remark*

We can see then without much doubt that the teacher's judgments are bound to be anything but objective. Where the danger comes is not so much in the teacher using his subjective responses, but in making believe both to himself and to the

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of this dualism, see Chapter Thirteen, p. 152 ff.

child that he is not doing so. The word 'subjective' is begging the question, too, for the teacher who reacts emotionally and for unconscious reasons, without awareness, is using one kind of subjectivity, but the teacher who is reacting in a whole manner, who has not only thought about the child's expression for its own sake but also for the sake of all expression, such a teacher, holding within himself subject and object, will be using quite a different form of subjectivity. For him, assessment in marks is meaningless, it emphasises the duality of good and bad from which he is trying to escape. But the remark can be very valuable for his purposes.

A great deal could be said about the art of giving back work. It must be repeated that a teacher's life is so busy that he can rarely give the time to this personal act of relationship which it needs. At the latency stage, children react more to what others say about their work, or what the teacher says about it in front of others. They like public praise and do not often resent public censure. Moreover, much of their work will be of the co-operative nature described in Section One and the praise and correction will become part of the selective process of the whole method. The teacher's job here is to see that something of every child's is used. But the infant and the adolescent are in different positions. For the infant, what she has written she has written, and she expects you to take it, good or bad. She will, too, give away her efforts fairly readily. The adolescent who, as we saw in Chapter Ten is falling in love with the world, wants you to protect her expression for her. She rarely likes her work given back publicly and she likes to keep it. This is the general rule, there are naturally many exceptions. The remark, however, which is intended for her alone is very valuable to her. This need not always be written on the composition. It can sometimes be said to a child, but not at an interview specially arranged but in some odd moment of encounter. I remember meeting the writer of the plum-branch poem in a corridor and saying casually: 'Oh, by the way, I liked that poem you gave me in.' She replied equally casually: 'Did you? Good. Well, now you know how I do my thinking.' What the reply meant I do not know altogether, but I felt at the time that there was a reality about the encounter. Nor is it wise to make the same or a similar remark too often. Adolescents particularly value the thought that is put into each variation. I remember as an undergraduate reacting in this way. When the professor wrote: 'You are trembling on the brink

of a huge absurdity' I knew that at least my stupidity had reached worth-while proportions; then when after a few weeks another essay gained the comment: 'This seems to me really excellent' (and how much better that remark is than just 'excellent'), I felt that the goodness of one essay had gained from the badness of another; or, to put it in another way, both the good and the bad were acknowledged in the same imaginative way. If we make up our minds never to condemn what is a genuine shoot from the parent stem or to leave the child's creativity untouched, then we can lop off any superfluous boughs and strike out spurious growths fearlessly—the child will be on our side. She may wince a little when we say, as we must sometimes, 'this is absurd', 'that is claptrap', but only when we refuse the live branch will she be moved at the roots. Had I returned *Fishes* as a fantasy too wide of the mark I should probably have done real harm.

I have emphasised these attitudes to goodness and badness in children's work because I believe profoundly that the whole question of judgments reverts to this fundamental problem of our primary ambivalence. When work is corrected the child is so often made to feel guilty and inferior, so that she becomes conscious of her moral nature which is bound up with 'the composing legalism' and rules of style, instead of realising her aesthetic nature by simply 'seeing the beast', as did for example the writer of *Tennis*. The good style will gradually evolve and the right word be in the right order as it follows the urge and purpose of the writer. This is what we should acclaim as good writing, whether we find it almost perfectly composed from the technical point of view as it is in the *Don Quixote* and *Christian dialogue*<sup>5</sup> or imperfectly composed from this angle as it is in *Tennis*.

#### *IV. Relative and Absolute Standards*

It is most likely that the assessors of the boys' essays were motivated on all these levels; that they all had a good sense of style, but that they differed in what they thought could be achieved at different levels of development, and that their unconscious reactions to good and bad were activating their judgments in varying degrees. But the marker who deals with one child's work over a fairly long period is responding to it

<sup>5</sup> Page 61.

with even more complicated intentions. We noted in Chapter Five<sup>6</sup> that it was one of the results of our failure to understand the child's ambivalence that we grow to expect one thing and fail to notice when we are given another; that it is very easy to pre-judge work. My sixth form once brought me up sharply here. They asked me if I could distinguish their styles and I replied with confidence that by their age I could. Cunningly, they allowed a holiday to elapse, and when they had written the first essay next term they exchanged scripts and copied out each others'. My remarks largely confirmed their opinion that I was influenced by what I expected.<sup>7</sup> Here then is yet another influence which is likely to affect one's standards. The boys' examiners also no doubt reacted to a norm which they had developed in their minds—a norm composed of all the compositions of all the boys of that age which they had read. In other words, are we not coming to the conclusion that no teacher has one standard, but many standards confusedly working together, the absolute and relative aspects of which cannot easily be distinguished?

In his development of the principles of Gestalt psychology Koffka sheds some light upon this question of relative and absolute values during an excursion into aesthetics, and his argument is relevant to the reasoning of this chapter. He asks us to call *P* the work of art, and *A* and *B* two critics, and to suppose that *A* likes *P* and *B* dislikes *P*. The *Pa* (i.e. *A*'s liking for *P*) and the *Pb* (i.e. *B*'s dislike of it) attitudes are not simple functions of *P*, but also of *A* and *B*. Now there are obviously *P* to the *N*th ways of reacting to *P*; but is there one way of all these ways more proper than the rest which it is the job of the critic to discover? We have, he says, to realise that each critic is not looking at the picture before him as if it were the first picture he had seen. This is true of any object presented to our view. It is never isolated, but it belongs to all the other things of the same class which we have met with. 'The class scheme forms a sort of framework or standard, and what does not go into the framework or does not conform to the standard appears as inferior.'<sup>8</sup> Applying this to the picture, he continues: 'When we see a picture we do not only see this particular object different from all other objects, but we see a

<sup>6</sup> Page 57.

<sup>7</sup> See further discussion of this 'field' influence in discussion on Gestalt Psychology, Chapter Thirteen, p. 155 ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, by K. Koffka, p. 349.

picture, that is, a member of a class. And therefore its quality will depend to a large extent upon the degree to which it fits into our picture schema. . . . And if these schemas are as rigid as most of our schemas are, they will necessarily perceive as inferior a new work of art which does not fit into them. But schemas, historically considered, are not immutable. The more works of the new kind produced, the more will they contribute to the picture schema, particularly since the different schemas are not unrelated to each other.<sup>9</sup>

Now when we are judging children's compositions we are influenced in this way by three class schemas, as has already been observed. By the one produced from all the other compositions of children of this age which we have read, and by everything else of this child's which we have read; so that if a child produces something which appears outside either of these schemas, it is easily rejected; and thirdly by one composed of all the essays of other writers which we have read. The standard of good writing will evolve mainly within this group. It must be remembered that the analyses made of the qualities of these compositions reproduced in this book were not by any means first reactions, but were the result of careful study of them some time afterwards. In fact they have come to form a schema within themselves in the field of the whole scheme of the book. Nothing is ever judged in isolation. But the question now arises here which Koffka posed for art. In spite of, or because of, these class schemas is there not one standard to apply to written composition better than any other? Is it not conceivable that of the eight examiners who read the boy's essay already referred to, one was nearer to this standard than any of the others?

It is at this point in the argument that Koffka reminds us of the existence of the artist as well as of the work of art. Will not, he asks, the proper *N* be the way of looking at *P* that the artist has? He calls this *Pa*. But this is difficult to discover, since we are only left with *P*. It is well known, he argues, that many musicians, painters and poets have only come to understand their own work thoroughly when a particular conductor or critic has landed on that elusive *Pa*. There is a proper way of looking at a work of art—the one that satisfies the artist and comes nearest to his own *Pa*. In the same way, can we say that the best judge of original composition is the one who comes

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, pp. 349–350.

closest to understanding the idea which the child was trying to express, and who only judges the result in terms of the success of such expression? I think we can. But the teacher versus the child is not in the same position as the critic versus the artist, because, as we saw in the last chapter, in any creative effort the teacher is part of the composition in a way in which a critic is not. The teacher, in judging the expression of the children whom he teaches, is to some extent judging himself. This is inevitable, but it is not an argument to use in favour of outside examiners and assessors, for in work of this kind no external assessor knows children well enough and the circumstances of their work to understand their ideas in relation to their forms. It is, to me, a most significant fact that even after the lapse of many years when I re-read the sayings or compositions in this book, the children who said or wrote them are brought most vividly to mind. I wonder very much if I could have reached an understanding of *Fishes* or *Plum-branch* without a knowledge of the writers, although I am quite incapable of defining this connection between expression and personality. As soon as I began to attach this sentence to that trait, something in my power to understand either would, I believe, be lost. We may use *Hamlet* as an example of the Oedipus Complex, but we have not explained *Hamlet*.<sup>10</sup> We may give *Fishes* as an example of the expression of unconscious sexual conflict, but we have not explained this particular girl. I emphasise this point lest anyone should think I am advocating the substitution of a psychological analysis of expression for the correcting and evaluating of it. Nothing would be more pernicious. Children want us to correct their work, to praise it, or to say where it falls short; not to dissect their personalities through it. They must feel sure that we have standards—that we are judging them in relation to others of their age (they do not resent comparison with each other anything like as much as we imagine), that we are watching their own progress, and more than both these, that we shall hold fast to what we know to be good in the works of others and constantly keep it before them, not expecting them slavishly to imitate the great masters, but as Schlegel once advised a youthful artist 'to carry their creations in his heart as eternal guides to his efforts.'<sup>11</sup> In fact we have seen that unless children feel sure that we hold our standards clearly

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Nine, p. 103.

<sup>11</sup> *Modern German Paintings* (Bohn), p. 293.

they do not feel secure enough in themselves to create. Moreover, the teacher himself will feel his position jeopardised if he can have no belief in the validity of his own judgments. But this is where it is important to remind ourselves of Buber's idea of one-sided relationship, for although the child will not know that we are thinking of her in this way for, as Buber says, she does not know what it is to be an educator, nevertheless this is what we are doing, and we must come over on to her side if we are to understand her *Pa*. Whilst never losing our standards, our function is to keep them so dynamic that we can welcome the new composition which will disturb and change our schema, and to keep our own reading and tastes so catholic that we can make room for more and more new forms of writing. Teachers whose reading of English literature stops at Thomas Hardy cannot hope to keep pace with the modern schoolgirl or boy. But our job is bigger than this. It demands understanding at deeper levels; a realisation that in needing to express something a certain way a child may be unconsciously motivated and this, her way of sublimation; an awareness, too, that in our evaluation of this expression we may be revealing our own unconscious attitudes, and this, our way of projection. It is good that the child should so express herself, bad that we should so project ourselves. Realisation of the possibilities of one and awareness of the danger of the other should be enough for the teacher on the side of the child to give back work with a remark which will keep expression free and at the same time put her in touch with the masters of her craft.





*Section Four*

ORIGINATION

An Examination of Fundamental Principles

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning ;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything.)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

N.B. In this Section which deals chiefly with generalisations and conclusions drawn from the empirical data of the foregoing chapters I have employed the more universal masculine pronoun for the child.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### A UNITARY VIEW OF DEVELOPMENT

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#### *I. Theories of Development*

MANY ATTEMPTS have been made within the last century to explain the different stages through which a child passes on his journey from birth to maturity. One of the oldest views of development was what Burt called the 'stratigraphical' view, which held that growth proceeded from one level of intellectual achievement to another—from perception to memory to reason, and so on. This theory was exploded along with faculty psychology.<sup>1</sup> Another theory which held sway for some time was the recapitulation theory,<sup>2</sup> which assumed that a child in his progress followed broadly the phases of the evolution of the race; this and the culture epoch theory which probably grew out of it, and which held that cultural movements were reflected in child behaviour, are no longer taken in anything but the widest sense; or they may apply at times to some aspects of development, but cannot be related to the whole picture.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, further studies in the fields of anthropology and biology, as well as such a fundamental concept as Jung's collective unconscious, have shown us that these theories never did anything but touch the fringe of a most complex and far-reaching problem—the problem of inherited acquired characteristics.<sup>4</sup> Other attempts have been made to search for the rhythms of growth—and the view that a child passes from a stage of unreality to a stage of reality and thence to a period of abstraction has held ground in many different ways and still informs a good deal of educational practice. Wordsworth pictured the young child as a kind of solitary romantic, trailing clouds of glory, and then he saw

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Eight, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Five, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> For example we did see that certain aspects of the dramatic writings of the middle ages are reflected in the young child's play-writing. See Chapter Three, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> For a full discussion of these theories see *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, by Susan Isaacs, pp. 61, 62.

him gripping the reality principle of life,<sup>5</sup> and after that experimenting with the romance of mathematical generalisations and philosophical speculations.<sup>6</sup> And indeed this is a view which is not so far removed from Freudian conceptions of latency and adolescence as might at first seem. We should now disagree with his mystical speculations about the purity of infancy, but much of his educational theory as expressed in *The Prelude* is astonishingly close to modern psychological insight. Professor Whitehead, following a Wordsworthian path and matching also Hegel's three divisions of Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis, employed three rhythms in education<sup>7</sup>; he termed them the stage of romance, the stage of precision and the stage of generalisation. He agreed, however, that one stage was barren without the other. The evidence in these chapters reflects the truth of these distinctions in a broad way, but nevertheless demonstrates their inadequacy as a description of the full growth of individual minds and points to the necessity all along the line for a more synthetic conception of growth. It has been due chiefly to the work of Professor Spearman and Dr. Susan Isaacs that these theories have been replaced by a more genetic approach, and one which regards the mind as a unity and children as functioning as a whole in a total environment.

## II. Noegenesis<sup>8</sup>

Spearman first clarified the noegenetic principles of mental development and Dr. Isaacs demonstrated their applicability

<sup>5</sup> 'that delightful time of growing youth  
When craving for the marvellous gives way  
To strengthening love for things that we have seen.'  
*The Prelude*, Book V., ll. 539-541.

<sup>6</sup> 'Mighty is the charm  
Of these abstractions to a mind beset  
With images, and haunted by herself,  
And specially delightful unto me  
Was that clear synthesis built up aloft  
So gracefully.'  
*The Prelude*, Book VI, l. 158 ff.

Book VI as a whole deals with this stage of synthetic generalisation in the older adolescent.

<sup>7</sup> *The Rhythm of Education*, by A. N. Whitehead, 1922, p. 11 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis=power of generating new mental content. Noe from Greek nous=power of attaining belief upon adequate grounds. Hence noe-genesis=power of producing new ideas on the basis of ideas already accepted.—*Creative Mind*, C. Spearman, 1930, p. 35.

in the educational field. The three noegenetic laws Spearman enunciated as follows:<sup>9</sup>

1. The law of simple apprehension.  
'A person tends to know his own sensations, feelings and striving.'
2. The law of the eduction of relations.  
'When two or more items (precepts or ideas) are given, a person may perceive them to be in various ways related.'
3. The law of the eduction of correlates.  
'When any item and a relation to it are present to the mind, then the mind can generate in itself another item so related.'

These stages, he explains, are built upon each other and generally operate together.

Dr. Isaacs recognised maturation as in the first place undoubtedly an affair of increase in the depth and breadth and range of this synthetic ability or noetic synthesis.<sup>10</sup> 'It seems to be quite possible,' she writes, 'that the apparent differences in the age at which particular relations can be dealt with are really due to differences in the degree of concreteness and in the complexity of the tests actually used.'<sup>11</sup> She quotes Hazlitt as saying: 'The first organising act of the child differs in no way from that involved in the profoundest discovery of the scientist or the philosopher.'<sup>12</sup> These views have been strongly borne out in these pages, where we have seen that the child's creative ability is of the same kind as that of the mature artist; the same imaginative process is at work in both, but acting on different levels of experience and skill. Whereas we have observed that if experience is put concretely before children in the deeds of the heroes and heroines of literature, they are capable of understanding it with insight of a remarkably advanced kind.<sup>13</sup>

The failure to understand the operation of the noegenetic laws in this synthetic way misleads many educationists, who are otherwise willing to accept genetic principles. For example, even such a recent study as that of A. F. Watts's *The Language and Mental Development of the Child*,<sup>14</sup> which includes much

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-23.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem*, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> *Ability*, Victoria Hazlitt, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that Spearman defines insight or intuition as the knowledge upon adequate ground which is generalised in a new idea. Op. cit., p. 35. 'Creation and insight are absolutely co-incidental.'

<sup>14</sup> 1944.

valuable research and which takes its stand upon the necessity for a recognition of the important principle of genetic sequence,<sup>15</sup> nevertheless falls into error over and over again, because it has failed to comprehend the unitary significance of the laws of noegenesis, neglecting as it does as well the deeper levels of unconscious conflict. For example, a child does not move from reproductive to creative thought, from the concrete to the abstract, in a strict time sequence; if his intelligence is high enough and his environment rich enough, even a young child will produce thought and behaviour showing the power to think abstractly and creatively. The material brought together from the Malting House School, Cambridge, where Dr. Isaacs made her experiments, gives a very clear picture of of this. Whereas the evidence here from children's expression shows how such a statement as the following falls short of the truth:

To set children to write about other children whom they know well is to find abundant evidence of their unreadiness below the age of thirteen for the study of the motives and purposes of adults whose minds are so much more mature and complex.<sup>16</sup>

Mistakes like this arise from a too narrow conception of child life and one which neglects the amazing wealth of emotional experience which a child of five has lived through, and it neglects, too, his power to look into the future and anticipate the life which is apprehended but not yet lived.<sup>17</sup> His intuition is built upon this threefold existence of past, present and future which can come into play if he is placed in the right imaginative environment. For it is in the matrix of life being lived that a whole thought or experience must shape itself.

The reader will be able to find many examples in these pages of the co-existence of several levels of thought.<sup>18</sup> For example,

<sup>15</sup> The theory of genetic sequence assumes that children develop growth curves, that there are levels of mental organisation hierarchical in character and complexity and successive in time. See Watts, p. 244.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, A. F. Watts, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> This does not only apply to children.

Cf. Goethe to Eckermann, 26 Feb., 1824. 'I had "experienced" nothing of what I put into my first play and I must therefore have possessed knowledge of the most varied human conditions through anticipation. Anticipation only extends to objects which are analogous to the nature of the subject.'

<sup>18</sup> Chapter Ten, on 'The Repression Stage of Adolescence', bears this out with particular emphasis.

in the Snowdrop poem,<sup>19</sup> although the child is primarily concerned with the apprehension of sensations, feelings and strivings; the snowdrops are white, small, green, etc., and she feels and acts towards them in a certain way: yet relationship is developing. 'This is my life; that is the snowdrop's; they are different.' 'Snowdrops are white; snow is white'; then suddenly she employs the third principle of cognition and educes a correlate something like this:

White things are clean.  
Snowdrops are white.  
Snowdrops are clean.  
Clean things freshen up a room.  
Snowdrops will make my room look clean.

But there is no genetic sequence here. The thought is all one and at once.

### III. Unitary Process

In this recognition of the embryonic structure of child thought are we not describing all biological structures? And it is surely not strange that human life should in this way display the forms of all living organisms. Lancelot Law Whyte, a modern scientist-philosopher, has written:

It would therefore be natural to expect to find in man apparently the best equipped for survival of all species, the same balanced development of characteristic form as is displayed in the unfolding beauty of plants and in the grace and efficiency of animals.<sup>20</sup>

But the same writer points out that contemporary civilised man has lost the co-ordination which is one of the normal conditions of biological survival. The proper aim of science, he maintains, is to regain 'the search for unity in diversity, and for continuity in change'.<sup>21</sup> This latter he terms 'process',

<sup>19</sup> Chapter Seven, No. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *The Next Development in Man*, L. L. Whyte, 1944, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, Glossary of Unitary Thought, p. 269. It is interesting to compare this definition of unitary process with Coleridge's definition of beauty: 'the most general definition of beauty is multiteity in unity.' *On the Principles of Genial Criticism* included in *Biographica Literaria and Aesthetical Essays*, ed. Shawcross, p. 232. (Multiteity was a scholastic term re-introduced by Coleridge to avoid the familiar use of multitude.)



and if it displays a general form of continuity he calls it a unitary process, whereas if it appears to display two incompatible forms, he calls it dualistic. This valuable concept, it seems to me, can be applied to the field of child development and child expression. We have observed some of the dualistic forms of expression which Mr. Cook's boys produced, where two incompatible aims and methods were at work, and where the unitary continuity in change which is characteristic of all imaginative acts was lost, so that instead of fusion of ideas we found juxtaposition.<sup>22</sup> Nor are these concepts of unitary and dualistic process unrelated to true and false griffinism<sup>23</sup>; nor, as has already been pointed out, to that fundamental difference between fancy and imagination which Coleridge claimed to have discovered.<sup>24</sup> In fact if, as a recent critic<sup>25</sup> has suggested, Coleridge in making this distinction was really expressing his whole revolt against the mechanical materialism of the eighteenth century,<sup>26</sup> can we see how strongly in line this observation is with the argument of this book; and how far-reaching these conclusions are. The same critic, in asserting that the famous comparison is more than 'an observable difference between two kinds of poetry'—it is 'profound distinction in our ways of responding to experience'<sup>27</sup>—is putting in another context the main thesis of Mr. Whyte's book that the dualistic-unitary antithesis is not merely a philosophic distinction but a most significant split in contemporary life and thought; whilst in distinguishing in these chapters between true and false griffinism, I have not only been concerned with pedagogic differences in children's compositions, but I see the difference as I think Ruskin saw it, as a conflict between two incompatible ideologies, as indeed part of the struggle in which the world is now engaged.

It has therefore become not only the imperative aim of science but also of art, and especially the art of the educator, to seek for this unitary process, this continuity in change which

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Nine, p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> Basil Willey in *Coleridge on Imagination and Fancy*, Warton Lecture on English Poetry, 1946.

<sup>26</sup> 'the fancy-imagination antithesis is not merely the product of literary sensitiveness in Coleridge . . . it is also a vital stage in his life and death struggle against the mechanical materialism of the eighteenth century', *op. cit. supra*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

displays a general form. For in all genuine expression this unity is revealed where the past glistens in the present and the future is held treasure there also. Throughout this study we have laid strong emphasis on this double need in the child to go back and secure his past experience through indetification, dramatisation and symbolism; and also his need to experiment and go forward in anticipatory thought, in metaphor and correlative ideas.<sup>28</sup> We saw how this double need was satisfied in the dramatic play of the infant,<sup>29</sup> in the young child's dramatisation of epic material, and in adolescent phantasy and imagination. It has occurred to me that the complex forms of all the arts may rest upon this fundamental psychological structure; the need to experiment, the need to feel secure; for cannot we trace to this source the contrasts that appear in variation and repetition, in sound and silence, objects and space, difference and similarity; contrasts which underlie the creations of the musician, the architect, the painter and the poet?

#### *IV. Polarity and Ambivalence*

But the relationship between these contrasts is not a harmony from static and separated wholes, but instead a harmony wrought upon conflict and dynamic in its operation. The retreat of space and the projection of stone are brought together through a process of strains and stresses, for it is the competition and tension of weights and thrusts that raises the spires of the Gothic cathedral or composes the pediment of the Greek temple. Similarly, the desire to go back and the desire to go forward do not appear in the child in peaceful succession, but more frequently they are at war within him, as indeed are the conservative and rebellious tendencies in man. To acknowledge only one side of this conflict is to produce the

<sup>28</sup> 'An event has a past. This means that an event mirrors within itself the modes of its predecessors as memories which are fused into its own content. An event has a future. This means that an event mirrors within itself such aspects as the future throws back on to the present; or, in other words, as the present has determined concerning the future. Thus an event has anticipation. These conclusions are essential for any form of realism.' *Science and the Modern World*, A. N. Whitehead, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> See *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, p. 104. 'Ability to evoke the past in imaginative play is closely connected with the power to evoke the future in constructive hypothesis and to develop the consequences of "ifs".'

dualism through which the present world is being torn asunder. Balance and reconciliation come only through the acknowledgment of conflict. 'The idealist,' writes Mr. Whyte, 'seeks the security of a static harmony and therefore considers every tension evil. Unitary man recognises tension as an essential feature of the formative process operating in man. Man creates in resolving tensions, but never brings them to an end.'<sup>30</sup> This equation of idealism and dualism contains a most significant truth. We have seen how dangerous the idealistic teacher can be, by setting standards of perfection beyond a child's achievements, and standards which are so frequently projections only of his own sense of inadequacy, reflections of his own dualistic nature.<sup>31</sup> This dualism has, however, been at work in European civilisation for many centuries. Both Mr. Whyte and the Gestalt philosopher Kohler are at one in tracing this 'disparity of the ideal and the real' which characterises European culture to the influence of Plato more than to any other philosopher. 'Plato is the symbol of Europe because he is the expression of the human demand for permanence in a universe of process,' writes Mr. Whyte,<sup>32</sup> and Kohler describes the Platonic preoccupation with the notion of 'something which ought to be' as the one which has led to a theory of absolute eternal and changeless values, neglecting those values arising from the world of common experience.<sup>33</sup> Or again, to quote Whyte, 'Ideals are thus temporary compensations for ignorance of the actual nature of man and of the form of his proper development.'<sup>34</sup>

Not only, therefore, are we to recognise the co-existence of different *levels* of thought in the laws of noegenesis, but also the co-existence of *opposite* ideas and feelings in polarity of thought and ambivalence of feeling. Teachers are still a long way from understanding this in practice; for not until they can accept a child's hostility as as much a part of his creativity as his submission will they be in a position to understand his expression.<sup>35</sup> So dualistic and lacking in co-ordination have our lives become that we are unable to accept a simple

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter Twelve, p. 134 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*, Wolfgang Kohler, pp. 37-41.

<sup>34</sup> Op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Ten, p. 105, and Chapter Eleven, p. 128.

injunction like 'love your enemies' as a profound recognition of primary ambivalence; but instead we try to divide the world into friends and enemies, loves and hates, good and bad, and to identify ourselves on an idealistic plane with the former, whilst we repress and try not to recognise the latter—except through projection. But it does not work. It produces war and destruction. For, paradoxically, unless human nature is constantly at war within itself it will never be at peace outside itself. It was this warfare of the spirit which Jung refers to as the battle with the shadow, with that part of the unconscious which if not recognised will be projected upon someone else to make the other person feel guilty.<sup>36</sup> This bringing into recognition the less desirable parts of our nature is what he describes as the process of 'individuation'; the acknowledgment of the self as what it is, and not as what we think it ought to be. The educator who is incapable of this attitude either towards himself or towards the child whom he teaches is at the same time incapable of understanding child expression—and of dealing with it *individually*. The process of individuation is greatly helped through artistic expression, because it is through imagination that the discordant elements of life are reconciled; and the teacher's art consists in this, that he shall bring into a whole the realities and desires, thoughts and phantasies, rebellions and submissions, good and bad, which he finds in the material before him.

We saw in Chapter Eleven how, in order to achieve this harmonising of opposites, it was necessary for the educator to enter into a special kind of relationship with his pupil, and Buber was referred to as the chief source of inspiration here. But it is necessary to point out that this understanding has existed at least as far back as Schiller, as indeed the recognition of both polarity and anticipation go back to Goethe.<sup>37</sup> Schiller was writing about aesthetic education, which is after all, also our topic, and he describes that kind of active indifference which the whole method of this book illustrates and he defines it as a state of fruitful equilibrium.<sup>38</sup> If the teacher is to gain true expression from his pupils he must be capable of being in this state. It is a condition which in some ways

<sup>36</sup> See *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, p. 183 ff. and pp. 250, 251; and *The Integration of the Personality*, p. 22 ff.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 17.

<sup>38</sup> *Briefe Ueber die aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen*, Letter 21.

resembles Keats' 'negative capability'<sup>39</sup> and Wordsworth's 'wise passiveness',<sup>40</sup> though it is different from both, and the operative word is equilibrium, which is perhaps more closely related to Coleridge's 'reconciliation and balance'. The teacher must, of course, be wise and capable, even though he learns how to be negative and passive, because, as we have seen, in a lesson he must act as well as be ready to be acted upon. But the state of mind which should precede all his action is the one which Schiller describes, and it is one which he can only adopt if he understands the significance of polarity and ambivalence. The teacher remains alert at a point of equilibrium—a kind of zero-point<sup>41</sup>—ready to move in the direction which will unite and fuse the antithetical points of his pupil's thought and being. If he does not do this, he will act in an arbitrary dualistic manner towards one side or the other.

*V. Towards a Theory of Value: Contributions of Gestalt Psychology*

Another form of dualism is practised by the teacher who does not realise that truth is of two kinds, and that any satisfactory theory of values must take this into account. Such understanding is implicit in the whole of this thesis and needs at this point explicit comment. I believe that the findings of the Gestalt<sup>42</sup> school of psychologists to which we have already had

<sup>39</sup> This quality, which Keats thought that Shakespeare 'possessed so enormously', was, he said, essential to a 'Man of Achievement'. It was, as he defined it, the power of 'being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' *The Letters of John Keats*, edited by M. B. Forman, Letter 32, p. 72.

<sup>40</sup> Nor less I deem that are Powers  
Which of themselves our minds impress;  
That we can feed this mind of ours  
In a wise passiveness.

*Expostulation and Reply*, Wordsworth, p. 481.

<sup>41</sup> Schiller calls it a 'point of nullity'.

<sup>42</sup> 'The noun "gestalt" has two meanings; besides the connotation of "shape" or "form" as a *property* of things, it has the meaning of a concrete individual and characteristic entity, existing as something detached and *having* a shape or form as one of its attributes.' Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology*, p. 148.

'A "gestalt" is therefore a product of organised parts and conversely the organisation of parts leads to a "gestalt". However, it is not the organisation of mere juxtaposition or random distribution of parts; but in the process of organisation "what happens to a part of the whole is determined by intrinsic laws inherent in the whole".' Wertheimer, *Über Gestalttheorie*.

occasion to refer,<sup>43</sup> offer more contributions to a satisfactory theory of value than any other single body of research. It is obviously quite impossible for us to trace all the educational implications of this highly complex and extensive philosophy, though I believe the time is ripe for such a study to be made.<sup>44</sup>

Koffka, one of the chief exponents of Gestalt theory, has distinguished two kinds of environment, that which is real in the sense that it is geographically locatable, and that which is behavioural in the sense that it is phenomenal or experienced.<sup>45</sup> He gives in illustration the case of the man who rode over Lake Constance when it was ice-bound thinking that he was riding over terra firma, and when he discovered what he had done he dropped down dead. The ice-bound lake was the man's geographical environment, the level plain his behavioural one. If we only regard the geographical environment of children we have learnt only half the truth about them, for it is impossible to understand a child's behaviour without taking into account what he thinks and feels he is doing, what he thinks and feels towards us, and what he thinks we feel towards him. All this behavioural environment is as much part of the whole truth as is the overt act upon which he is usually brought to judgment. We have seen too that in his written and dramatic expression what he has attempted to interpret as the truth of his environment has been interpenetrated at all points by the other truth of his own needs and phantasies. To the child, the geographical and behavioural environments often appear as one. He practises his remarkable feats without fainting with fright because he has not learnt to separate truth into two parts; especially is this true of the pre-adolescent. So whole are his conceptions that he is capable of riding across most difficult tracts of country if we give him full rein to his behavioural postures and allow him to do one thing very often in the belief that he is doing another. In this way we saw how he penetrated the difficult and many-peaked country of epic and romance—took Achilles and Hector in his stride and had no fear at what he had done, for were they not himself and his own extensions as well as glorious people in their own right?

The work of anthropologists has shown us that the descrip-

<sup>43</sup> See Introduction, p. 17. Chapter Twelve, p. 138 ff.

<sup>44</sup> The only attempt of which I am aware to follow the implications of Gestalt into the classroom is that of Miss Marjorie Hammond, which has already been referred to in footnote 3, Chapter Two.

<sup>45</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 27 ff.

tion of any mentality different from our own, whether it be that of children or primitive peoples, is only complete if their behavioural fields as well as their geographical ones are adequately described. This field concept we have already touched upon when we realised how it influenced our evaluation of children's work.<sup>46</sup> The man crossing the lake behaved as he did because he thought he was on a level plain and not the ice-bound lake. I corrected one child's essay in the field of another's and therefore behaved differently towards it. Or to put the same idea into other Gestalt terms: that things are as they are does not explain why they look as they look.<sup>47</sup> For according to the Gestaltists the world is 'neither a mosaic of sensations nor a "booming, buzzing confusion", nor a blurred and vague total unit; rather does it consist of a definite number of separate objects and events which, as separate objects and events, are products of organisation.'<sup>48</sup> Things look as they look because of certain inner laws of organisation within the field of the object, *as well as* certain inner laws within the field of the observer. Once this most important discovery is accepted then terms such as inner and outer, subject and object, begin to lose their meaning, as we found they became meaningless when we began to analyse a child phantasy or a piece of adolescent expression, for all 'seeing to the heart'<sup>49</sup> combines

The excellence, pure function and best power  
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.<sup>50</sup>

One of the chief laws of organisation is called in Gestalt terms the law of *Pragnanz*, which states that 'psychological organisation will always be as "good" as prevailing conditions allow',<sup>51</sup> and that whether it is a shape or a piece of conduct the tendency is towards regularity, symmetry, simplicity.<sup>52</sup> We have observed how expression, too, follows this law. If it is allowed to move freely it will flow into a 'good' shape. Order, Koffka explains, is a characteristic which is the consequence of organisation and organisation is the result of natural forces. Nature produces order.

One of the most important of all Gestalt concepts is that of

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter Twelve, p. 138 ff.

<sup>47</sup> See Koffka, p. 75 ff.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>49</sup> Chapter Eight, p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> *The Prelude*, Book XIII, ll. 377, 378 (Oxford edition).

<sup>51</sup> Koffka, p. 110.

<sup>52</sup> See Herbert Read's discussion of this. *Op. cit.*, pp. 60-62.

the part-whole relationship. It claims that reality is not a mere collocation of elemental facts, but consists of units in which no part exists by itself but each part points beyond itself and implies a larger whole. Facts and significance cease to be two concepts relating to different realms—a fact is always a fact in an intrinsically coherent whole. We can solve no problem of organisation by solving it for each point separately one after the other; the solution must come for the whole.<sup>53</sup> So the problem of significance and meaning is closely bound up with the problem of the relation between parts and wholes. It is not just true to say that the whole is *more* than the sum of its parts, the whole is something *else* than the sum of its parts; because summing is a meaningless procedure, but the whole-part relationship is meaningful.<sup>54</sup>

The teaching of poetry would be revolutionised if this doctrine were thoroughly assimilated. It is illustrated by the method of the ballad mime outlined in Chapter Two where the children learned the meaning of a word only as part of a whole unit, and in Chapter Ten where passages from Shakespeare were understood in the light of a whole correlative meaning; whilst the conception of the imagination developed in Chapters Eight and Nine is in direct line with it; the work of Ruskin's Roman builder who fitted parts together in an aggregative fashion was 'a meaningless procedure', but the work of the Lombardic craftsman who saw the griffin as a whole was meaningful and significant. It had value.<sup>55</sup>

As soon as we begin to break down these barriers between the truth of what is and the truth of what seems, between subject and object, whole or part, we come upon the slippery path which has been so hazardously followed in all the arguments

<sup>53</sup> Goethe also understood this theory in a Gestalt sense. See for example *Philosophical Study*, 1784/5. 'In every living being what we call the parts are inseparable from the whole to such an extent that they can only be comprehended in and with the whole, and the parts cannot be taken as a measure of the whole, nor the whole be used as a measure of the parts.' Goethe: *Samtliche Werke, Jubiläums-Ausgabe*, Vol. 39, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> See Koffka, p. 683. 'In the process of organisation, what happens to a part of the whole is determined by intrinsic laws inherent in this whole.' (Wertheimer, p. 7.)

This whole-part relationship is also related to Piaget's concept of syncretistic understanding. See Chapter Two, p. 35, footnote 4, and also Chapter Ten, p. 109 ff.

<sup>55</sup> 'Value situations fall under the category of gestalt.' *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*, Kohler, p. 86.



used to explain the fact of empathy or *einfuehlung*.<sup>56</sup> The problem is well known. If we see a gloomy landscape, if a poplar looks proud, a young birch shy, daffodils joyful,<sup>57</sup> what has happened? Have we projected these feelings upon the objects, since we cannot seriously say that daffodils really are joyful, poplars proud, and landscapes gloomy? And yet we have to take into account, Koffka says, the fact that we may be in a cheerful mood and yet feel a landscape to be gloomy.<sup>58</sup> Wordsworth assumed that something inherent in the landscape induced the feeling as well as something in the observer.

A poet could not but be gay  
In such a jocund company.<sup>59</sup>

and he defines a poet as one who 'rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe'.<sup>60</sup> Wordsworth is here, I think, very close to Koffka's suggestion that events and objects can in themselves possess behavioural fields. 'Even inanimate objects may appear with needs, like the melody before it is finished, or when it is broken off before its end, or an incomplete figure pattern.'<sup>61</sup> The demand nature of experience and the quality of requiredness in things<sup>62</sup> is given a great deal of attention in Gestalt philosophy, and it brings us through the labyrinth of this argument to the fact which is, I believe, the central core of the present study, and which takes us back to the first sentence: 'Good teaching has always rested upon two kinds of understanding, an appreciation of the intrinsic values of the material

<sup>56</sup> See Herbert Read's discussion on empathy. *Op. cit.*, pp. 86-9.

<sup>57</sup> These instances are Koffka's.

<sup>58</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 326.

<sup>59</sup> 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', p. 187 (Oxford edition).

<sup>60</sup> *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, p. 937 (Oxford edition).

<sup>61</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 327.

<sup>62</sup> I think that Professor Niblett was right in assuming that the sudden recognition of the requiredness in things is really what we mean by a sense of wonder. 'A picture claps its hands before us; a tune taps at the door of the mind and we gladly let it in, feeling its perfection. A jug stands on the table and suddenly one day we see how well it expresses the inward desire of every jug, the desire to pour. We walk on the platform of the railway station and the morning express steams in, with its great engine even at a standstill seeming to embody speed and power. The picture, the tune, the jug, the engine have all succeeded in liberating for a moment a sense of wonder in us.' *Essential Education*, W. R. Niblett, pp. 72, 73.

to be taught, and a knowledge of the nature of children.' Translate this into Gestalt terms and it might read thus: There is in the facts of knowledge a requiredness—for 'certain facts do not only happen or exist', but they 'extend towards others with a quality of acceptance or rejection'.<sup>63</sup> There is in children a need, and this need extends towards the world of knowledge also with a quality of acceptance or rejection. This curious union which takes place in the learning situation between the demand of the learner and the requiredness of learning is what we call 'an interest'. For facts, as Kohler shows, do not exist ever in isolation, they are 'very partial, they are selective with regard to other facts to which they refer',<sup>64</sup> and the learner is also selective on the basis of his needs. And not until this interest is achieved can expression take place. Because we have seen that all expression is the result of a union between a personal need, conscious or unconscious, and some aspect of the universe which fulfils it.

Have we not now come within sight of a theory of value which applies as much to expression as it does to life and conduct? Value does not exist outside man in some perfect superior world, but in the world as we know it.

Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,  
 Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!  
 But in the very world, which is the world  
 Of all of us—the place where in the end  
 We find our happiness, or not at all.<sup>65</sup>

Wherever things and people make demands of us, wherever we require something from things and people, whatever we find a genuine interest in, there value lies. And it is reality itself which shapes value; for people who seek for it in the illimitable reaches of an ideal world are quixotically tilting at windmills, but the struggle of man within the realities of his own nature, Jung's battle with the shadow, Bunyan's struggle with Satan in the valley of the shadow, this is real life and here value lies. Always reality is the shaping power. Without the hard quality of things, of stone, or sound, of events or experiences, without these, the sculptor, musician and poet would be for ever 'moving about in worlds not realised'. But also with-

<sup>63</sup> *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*, Kohler, p. 72.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *French Revolution*, Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

## THE EDUCATION OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

out the yearnings, desires and demands of man, matter and experience would remain for ever unrequired and therefore valueless. For within the very nature of reality lies the incompleteness which man grasps as his own to fulfil. Professor Whitehead has expressed this in *Science and the Modern World*:

‘That which endures is limited, obstructive, intolerant, infecting its environment with its own aspects. But it is not self-sufficient. The aspects of all things enter into its very nature. It is only itself as drawing together into its own limitation the larger whole in which it finds itself. Conversely, it is only itself by lending its aspects to this same environment in which it finds itself. The problem of evolution is the development of enduring harmonies of enduring shapes of value, which merge into higher attainments of things beyond themselves. Aesthetic attainment is interwoven in the texture of realisation.’<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Page 117.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### AN ANALYSIS OF EXPRESSION

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GRANTED THEN that the need to express is in man, the need to be expressed in the forms of reality which rest outside him, where does creativeness lie? What constitutes the work of art? And in relation to all this where is child expression to be placed? These are all questions which have been approached from many different angles throughout this thesis. In attempting in this final chapter to bring all our findings to some kind of conclusion and to define our terms more closely, I am aware of the tendency expressed by Kohler 'to be soothed and satisfied whenever a problem, instead of being solved, has merely been located somewhere'.<sup>1</sup> But until we have defined our terms no solution of any kind can be attempted, nor do I pretend to offer one. I hope, however, to place these tentative answers in such a position that the reader, instead of being soothed and satisfied, will be urgently driven to find a theory of expression which will not only fit these discoveries but which will also include his own experience.

#### *I. Expression in Relation to Intelligence*

One likely question must be met at the outset, and one which has probably often been in the reader's mind. Would it not, I am frequently asked, be quite impossible to obtain expression of the kind we have considered, from children who have been creamed in the Modern Secondary School? I have already pointed out that the school in which I taught was not a selective Grammar school,<sup>2</sup> and that there was a wide range of intelligence amongst the children, but only in the case of the child who wrote *Thunder Rock*<sup>3</sup> had I knowledge of an I.Q., and this was obtained four years later. Apart from this, I could only guess.

Spearman's second and third laws of cognition stand of

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Seven, No. II and Chapter Ten, pp. 96-108.

course in high correlation with intelligence,<sup>4</sup> and he further claims that all expression in language takes the form of educating correlates.<sup>5</sup> But although verbal facility is largely dependent upon intelligence, the ability to educe relations, for example, is there before a child is able to show it in words, and there is at all ages and levels a considerable time-lag between understanding and expression. Moreover, the gap between the ability to express an understanding of simple and complex relations is a wide one. A child of seven in the Terman and Merrill intelligence test is asked to explain how two concrete things are alike, but it is not until the average adult standard that the ability to find the identity of opposites is called for.<sup>6</sup> So a child with a low I.Q. will not only find it difficult to understand any relationship of ideas, he will probably be quite unable to put such comprehension into words. Therefore it would certainly seem that most of the children who have in this book expressed themselves in any sustained effort even in non-verbal terms, that is through dramatisation, had an average and in most cases above average intelligence. I think that the writer of *Tennis* was most probably an exception here, and this may explain her inability to use grammatical forms; there is certainly very little correlative thought in the content. But she is able to use an imaginative grasp of events and to see them in some relationship; though the bulk of the essay is on the level of simple apprehension of experience. I have remarked that this piece of work was exceptional from this child, and I believe she used all the creative energy she possessed to achieve this impressionistic *tour de force*. She had little intelligence, but she used everything she had, and that is the important point.<sup>7</sup>

Superior intelligence is certainly necessary to produce the higher levels of creativeness, and especially to creat new fundaments of thought—an ability that for the argument of this chapter I shall call originality. A good average intelligence is necessary probably for adequate verbal expression; but outside all this there remains for the person of average or lower intelligence a very rich field of expressiveness, and this I should

<sup>4</sup> See *Abilities of Man*, Chapter XII, 'amount of G (i.e., general factor of intelligence) in different kinds of education', p. 199 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *The Nature of Intelligence*. 'By means of education it is then that the thought becomes converted into a shape suitable for language; by this means some item is picked out to furnish grammatical subject, another the verb, and so on.' p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> See *Measuring Intelligence*, Terman and Merrill, pp. 228, 286.

<sup>7</sup> See examination of *Tennis*, Chapter Twelve, p. 131.

like to explore further because I believe there is a very real danger in the modern trend towards selection and segregation, based as it largely is upon intelligence. Much of the variety and richness of response in the lessons I have described came from those children who were unable to produce any sustained account of their experience. These children gain enormously, if no competitive methods are used, from being in the same class as the more intelligent ones. I have noted in Chapter Three, for example, that if a child has only a few sentences in a play, and if she has joined receptively or verbally in the discussions, she feels the result to be shared.<sup>8</sup> And this is the picture of real life, for among grown-up people those who only have the power to apprehend experience are nevertheless helped in their ability to live by the efforts of those who can pass on the results of their relational and correlative discoveries. Separation into streams of ability ought not to take place in lessons where as well as intelligence much more is required—a sensitive response to life and a joy in concrete experience for its own sake as well as many special gifts besides. And let us remember a saying of Spearman's which comes well from one of the fathers of intelligence research: 'Every normal man, woman and child is a genius at something as well as an idiot at something else.'<sup>9</sup> We are not so likely to be harbouring 'mute inglorious Miltons' in our classes—genius will out; but we may quite easily, if linguistic expression is our aim at all costs, be losing to the world a large number of sensitive and happy people. Expressiveness, too, in some form or another, is essential to love.

Throughout this thesis we have stressed the importance of the growth of spontaneity and the production of creative energy. But here a misinterpretation might easily arise, for in stressing the significance to the less gifted child of expressiveness as apart from expression, I am not advocating aimless activity which has no claim to be called educative at all, nor that kind of formless self-expression which can so easily betray child nature. Buber was aware of this danger when he distinguished these false kinds of activity from the true 'instinct of origination'. 'Nor is the instinct I am speaking of to be confused with the so-called instinct to busyness or activity, which for that matter does not seem to me to exist at all (the child wants to set up or destroy, handle or hit, and so on, but never 'busy himself'). What is important is that by one's own intensely

<sup>8</sup> Chapter Three, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> *The Abilities of Man*, p. 221.

experienced action something arises that was not there before.’<sup>10</sup> This creativeness, Buber maintains, is nothing more than a presupposition of education: ‘Real education is made possible [but is it also established?] by the realisation that youthful spontaneity must not be suppressed but must be allowed to give what it can.’<sup>11</sup> This is important. Spontaneity is only a pre-requisite for education, it is not an end in itself; nor must we confuse free spontaneous expression with the completed artistic process. ‘Art,’ Buber rightly claims, ‘is only the province in which a faculty of production common to all reaches completion.’<sup>12</sup>

But we have just seen that artistic formulation in language is not easy for the less intelligent pupil. To escape this dilemma must we fall into the error of relegating only manual and non-verbal forms of expression to the backward and dull—is there no aesthetic satisfaction for them in literature or through the medium of words?

I believe that there are a good many children who, by virtue of something in their nature, by a happy coincidence perhaps of emotional feelings, by some special gift maybe that we have not yet come to define, and who also through the haunting power of past experience or ‘the obscure sense of possible sublimity’, have within them a way of apprehending the world aesthetically though they may be quite incapable of putting this into words; but when it is put into words for them in literature or into dramatic action by themselves or their fellows, they recognise it for what it is—aesthetic experience. This view can at present only be based upon the teacher’s intuition—until further research may enable us to devise reliable tests.<sup>13</sup> The kind of apprehension I am speaking of can often only be detected in the listening responses of children, and by noting their casual remarks. In the less intelligent child, because it is not easily verbalised or even perhaps dramatised, it is extremely difficult to waylay. Because I am claiming that this expression is open to such a child, I do not of course deny that the more imaginative, intelligent and original the child the richer will his aesthetic experience be.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Tests of aesthetic responses have been made, notably the Meyer Seashore Test. These test colour and shape discrimination. I have no personal experience of them, but according to Herbert Read they are easily guessed and it is possible to make the distinctions rationally without any direct feeling or sensibility being brought into use. See *Education through Art*, p. 248.

*II. What is Aesthetic Experience?*

Aesthetic experience is, I believe, the apprehension of the pattern of existence; in Gestalt terms, it is the recognition of the operation of the Law of *Pragnanz*—the appreciation of the 'good' shape wherever it appears.<sup>14</sup> Now this may or may not be related to expression, though it is part of the expressiveness of the individual, and it has I believe a value in and for itself. In fact it is in this appreciation of any object or event *for its own sake* that the aesthetic value lies. This is also a value to be clearly distinguished from that gained through imaginative experience, and one which fairly unimaginative people can attain. For as we have seen in all true imagination a unifying, fusing and balancing process takes place, and it is one that functions in conduct as well as in art. We can talk about imaginative behaviour, I do not think we can describe behaviour as aesthetic—although behaviour may produce in us an aesthetic response. The aesthetic is completely divorced from any moral, psychological or social meanings in a way that imagination is not.<sup>15</sup> It was this quality in experience which Tchegov pre-eminently, I think, discovered in the world around. It was through his imaginative power and by virtue of his originality that he was able to unify and re-create this experience in the larger artistic wholes of his plays and stories. Moreover his characters, astonishingly unimaginative people as a whole compared with Shakespeare's characters, sometimes show this power to see life aesthetically to a remarkable degree. They cannot always grasp the meaning of life, but they recognise its curious shapes.

The characters in Act Two of *The Cherry Orchard* are seated in the country at the edge of the estate at sunset, plunged in thought, when a distant sound, 'as it were from the sky—the sound of a breaking harp string', disturbs the silence.

<sup>14</sup> Chapter Thirteen, p. 156.

This was the description of aesthetic experience which Margaret Phillips reached in *The Education of the Emotions through Sentiment Development*: 'There may be a general factor in aesthetic experience—general sensibility to order and pattern.' p. 305.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Schiller: 'beauty gives no separate single result, either for the understanding or for the will; it does not carry out a single intellectual or moral object; it discovers no truth, does not help us to fulfil a single duty, and, in one word, is equally unfit to found the character or to clear the head.' *Letters on Aesthetic Education*: Letter XXI, p. 88, included in *Essays—Aesthetical and Philosophical* (Bohn Standard Library).



LYUBOV: What is that?

LOPAHIN: I don't know. Somewhere far away a bucket fallen  
and broken in the pits. But somewhere very far away.

GAEV: It might be a bird of some sort—such as a heron.

TROFIMOV: Or an owl.

LYUBOV (*Shudders*): I don't know why, but it's horrid.  
(*A pause.*)

FIRS: It was the same before the calamity—the owl hooted  
and the samovar hissed all the time.

GAEV: Before what calamity?

FIRS: Before the emancipation. (*A Pause.*)

LYUBOV: Come my friends, let us be going; evening is falling.  
(*To ANYA*) There are tears in your eyes. What is it,  
darling? (*Embraces her.*)

ANYA: Nothing, Mamma, it's nothing.<sup>16</sup>

Here six people of varying temperaments, with their anxiety, matter-of-factness, superstition and longing, are caught up in something quite different, of which they are all aware, of which their creator is keenly aware, an aesthetic experience. The evening, the stillness, the apprehensiveness of events in their lives, and the distant sound have produced a pattern—meaningless except as pattern, except as beauty, although they try to give it meaning, whilst the expression of the pattern which Tchegov so exquisitely effects is for us also an aesthetic experience primarily.

Now there is implicit in the material gathered in these chapters a great deal of just this quality of experience. It is not easy to recognise because once it has gained imaginative expression it begins to belong to larger wholes and perforce to lose its shape as merely aesthetic experience. We can detect it in the play of the Nursery School children.<sup>17</sup> Many needs and purposes drove them to play a game of war and battle, but when those urges grew less insistent, and the defeated joined the triumphal march with the conquerors, and the repetitive pattern of 'Bang-Crash-Fire-Bang-Shoot' took hold of them, and other children making their sand castles joined in, something else was happening. The children felt, I feel sure, a sense of patterned existence, something worth while in itself; and for a moment their play became an aesthetic experience more

<sup>16</sup> *The Cherry Orchard and other plays*, by Anton Tchegov, from the Russian by Constance Garnett, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter One, p. 24 ff.

than any other. The child who so beautifully caught the Eurydice glance of belated recognition was, I think, too, experiencing something purely aesthetic in its quality.<sup>18</sup> One of the distinguishing features of this experience is its often sudden remove from ordinary life. In fact it is not until we are in a sense out of gear with everyday life that we can apprehend it in this way. This is why aesthetic experience comes more easily to the young child through dramatisation—for this has placed him at an aesthetic distance.<sup>19</sup> The adolescent and the adult would be able to surprise such an expression as that between Orpheus and Eurydice upon the faces of two people they might meet in the street—not so, I think, the young child, who would much more likely be thinking what she was going to have for tea. (The adolescent might, of course, *try* to convince you that it was plum jam that was occupying her mind.) The child who remarked that *The Iliad* was a wonderful story<sup>20</sup> was on the whole inarticulate, but I feel certain that she had appreciated the *aesthetic* pattern of the story. The same quality was always apparent when she listened. This quality is distinct also from Wordsworth's 'auxiliary light',<sup>21</sup> because there is not necessarily any desire to give back anything of oneself at all. One is content simply to apprehend this piece of life. It might then be something in a distant sound, an expression caught between two people, a feeling of patterned movement, a sense of fittingness in a story—and it can, of course, be anything at all—from which we receive this aesthetic experience. To see life at this remove, to enjoy it for its own sake, is then a power within the reach of every child, however young; of every man and woman, however ungifted in the higher attributes of imagination, intelligence and originality. Probably the baby's obvious delight in his excreta, apart from being a sense of achievement, is also a pleasure of an aesthetic kind. And does he not in his lullings and lallings as well as satisfy a need to find security in repetition and a speech purpose, also discover in the experience an aesthetic enjoyment? One can, in fact, in little children, see the expression move from a joyous excited feeling of some-

<sup>18</sup> Chapter Six, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> This conception of 'aesthetic distance' has been formulated in the highly suggestive and illuminating essay by Edward Bullough, *Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle*. *Brit. Journal of Psychology*, V, pp. 87-118.

<sup>20</sup> Introduction, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter Ten, p. 108.

thing happening to a still contemplation of what has been achieved; a movement, in other words, from creative energy to æsthetic experience. This natural rhythm Wordsworth detected, and it was from this source he said that genius drew her power.

Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange  
Of peace and excitation, finds in her<sup>22</sup>  
His best and purest friend; from her receives  
That energy by which he seeks the truth,  
From her that happy stillness of the mind  
Which fits him to receive it when unsought.<sup>23</sup>

Because we have not genius, it is not to be assumed that we cannot gain access to the sources from which it springs. It is, in fact, as life and literature have often proved, sometimes the simple-minded who take upon them the function of 'God's spies' to reach the mystery of quite ordinary things. Wordsworth has, in the first two books of *The Prelude*, described the ways in which nature worked upon his 'creative sensibility' as a small boy, and we have a wonderful example of the change from activity and excitement to receptivity and contemplation in childhood in his account of the young lad who was shouting across the lake of Windermere in imitation of the owls. A careless, noisy boy, creating a din.

And when a lengthened pause  
Of silence came and baffled his best skill:  
Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung  
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise  
Has carried far into his heart the voice  
Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene  
Would enter unawares into his mind  
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks  
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received  
Into the bosom of the steady lake.<sup>24</sup>

At this moment Wordsworth would say the boy is being educated. He took this theory a long way in *The Prelude*, and goes as far as saying that it is through the experience of beauty, or what he calls sublimity, that the mind develops its cognitive

<sup>22</sup> i.e. in Nature, mentioned a few lines before.

<sup>23</sup> *The Prelude*, Book XIII, ll. 5-10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Book V., ll. 379-388

abilities. It is not that the power to educe relations gives a child the ability to experience life aesthetically, but, on the contrary, it is the aesthetic enjoyment itself which develops attentiveness, memory, and a sense of order and relation, and this, he says, can be achieved by many different forms of education. He expresses this in Gestalt terms almost, when he writes of the man

who hath among least things  
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts  
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.  
This, of all acquisitions, first awaits  
On sundry and most widely different modes  
Of education, nor with least delight  
On that through which I passed. Attention springs,  
And comprehensiveness and memory flow  
From early converse with the works of God  
Among all regions; chiefly where appear  
Most obviously simplicity and power.<sup>25</sup>

And once this sense of significance is developed, then harmony can be detected anywhere, even

Through meagre lines and colours, and the press  
Of self-destroying, transitory things.<sup>26</sup>

Not many children are able to find this 'simplicity and power' as Wordsworth was in 'the forms perennial of the ancient hills', and they need therefore

The self-created sustenance of a mind  
Debarr'd from Nature's living images.<sup>27</sup>

Here the teacher must help. He has to do more than paint buildings, put flowers about and pictures on the walls, he has to provide in language and literature a wealth of experience from which children can draw, often to themselves alone, this aesthetic response.

### *III. What makes a work of art?*

But now we have to define more clearly what happens between this experiencing of life on an aesthetic plane and a

<sup>25</sup> *The Prelude*, Book VII, ll. 734-744.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VII, ll. 769-770.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI, ll. 301, 302.

finished work of art. For all this expressiveness in people, valuable as it is to themselves and in their relations with other people, is nevertheless unproductive of new forms of expression. What are the agencies which genius or originality uses to tap these natural resources of creativeness? We have spoken at length of the work of imagination and we have used so far the poet's and not the psychologist's definitions. Spearman states that there is no separate creative faculty called imagination, but one general imaginative function operating through all noogenesis. It is at bottom, he says, the eduction of correlates.<sup>28</sup> Coleridge's definition, to a large extent, supports this view. He describes imagination as synthetic, relational (relating sameness and difference, general and particular, individual and typical, idea and image) and correlative (giving a new meaning to old things).<sup>29</sup> And yet he says much much more, and his additions are important. They have to do with the way in which these processes take place. These opposite ideas are related by 'balance or reconciliation'. Moreover, imagination, according to Coleridge, is more than a cognitive function, it also has to do with feeling and behaviour, with such qualities as judgment, self-possession, enthusiasm and strong emotion, and these also it harmonises. Further still, it is a function of form, and is concerned with the task of subordinating artistry to meaning. It has, in other words, the mediating work of seeing that the art of the poet does not get the upper hand. Imagination does not fashion the work of art entirely, but it produces the conditions whereby it can be created according to the poet's will; for the creator calls it forth, 'this power first put in action by the will and understanding'; and he remains in control of it, 'and retained under their irremissive though gentle and unnoticed control'. Imagination therefore unifies the material of life ready for the poet's use, it also acts as a check upon the inter-action of meaning and artistry, it creates, that is, the laws by which he must work. But the final work of art depends chiefly upon the operation of form. It is possible to have highly imaginative conceptions, but the result may not be a separate satisfying

<sup>28</sup> *The Nature of Intelligence*, Chapter XX, on 'Imagination'.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix No. 1. Cf. 'Then sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects' and 'Throughout this art (i.e. literature) the form of mental process essentially involved in creation is everywhere still the same, it is always the transplanting of an old relation and in consequence the generating of a new correlate.' *Creative Mind*, p. 98.

creation. On the other hand, a poem with a fairly small imaginative range may, by virtue of its form, achieve value as a work of art.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the degree of imaginative power exercised does largely determine the level of greatness which the finished work will attain. In short, according to the theories we have suggested in Section Two of this book, the factor which places creation at its highest pitch is besides imaginative intensity the psychological one of sublimation, and the factor which distinguishes a work of art from something that, however imaginative it might be, is still not a work of art, is the factor of form. Form should really be understood as the whole process of meaning expressed, the medium is the chosen outside instrument of expression, and artistry the poet's skill and technique in acting upon it. Form in this larger sense includes medium and artistry, and it is as we have discovered closely related to both sublimation and imagination.<sup>31</sup> We have now reached the point where all these definitions can be arranged for greater clarity in a schematic form, so that we can see at a glance wherein the material for art lies. The functions placed on the left belong to life as well as to art, those on the right belong more entirely, but not exclusively to art.

#### IV. A Scheme of Expression

##### CREATIVE ENERGY.

(Rising from instinctual sources chiefly libidinous.)<sup>32</sup>

##### SPONTANEITY.

(The accessibility of this power for personality.)

##### AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE.

(The contemplation of the patterns and forms of existence.)

<sup>30</sup> This was what I claimed for *Sea-Shanty*. See Chapter Nine, pp. 92, 93, 94.

<sup>31</sup> There is a wonderful description of this whole process at work in *The Birth of a Poem*, by Robert Nichols, which appears as an Appendix to *An Anatomy of Inspiration*, by Rosamund Harding. He writes some of it in the form of a dialogue between himself, the originator-poet, and his artificer who balances the form and meaning.

<sup>32</sup> In denying as he does the libidinous origin of creativity in favour of an autonomous 'instinct of origination', Buber is doing the very thing he is condemning as an 'impoverishment of the soul'; he is splitting up into separate faculties and impulses what is the most universal and powerful source of the artist's greatest achievements. (Op. cit. supra p. 85 ff.)

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### IMAGINATION.

(A unifying function based upon

- (a) the cognitive processes of relation and correlation;
- (b) the conative urge towards reconciliation, especially of opposite emotions and feelings.)

### SUBLIMATION.<sup>33</sup>

(The use of the energy of a sexual impulse in the conquest of reality.)

### ORIGINALITY.

(The highest operation of the cognitive function of imagination, essential to any significant work of art.)

### FORM.

(Medium yields its incompleteness to the generating impulses of ideas; and through the poet's artistry acting upon it, form results.)

### IDENTIFICATION

### SYMBOLISM

### PHANTASY

### DRAMATISATION

### METAPHOR

(These are means by which the individual seeks to unite his own ego needs with the demands of reality, hence they are all closely connected with sublimation.)

In any significant work of art all these processes are at work together, though they can all operate separately outside the sphere of art except form, which in the comprehensive sense in which we have taken it, implies art. Medium can, of course, go unused; stone can remain unchiselled, words unharnessed; and originality can exist in other realms, for example in Science and Mathematics. The final work of art is recognised as such by a quality of inevitability. The greater the originality achieved in it the more will the familiarity of its truth strike us as we enter 'the unknown, remembered gate'.<sup>34</sup> This sublime sense of what I would call 'no other-ness' of expression is rarely achieved in children's work because of the embryonic nature of its structures.

### *V. The Social Implication of Art and Expression*

However, all great art belongs to everybody and mutuality enters into it as part of the process of creation. How, then, can the artist be solitary? Yet this was Buber's fear. '... as an

<sup>33</sup> For a full psychological investigation of the nature and conditions of sublimation by Professor J. C. Flugel, see *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. XII, Part ii, June 1942, p. 97 ff.

<sup>34</sup> See passage from T. S. Eliot prefacing this Section,

originator man is solitary'<sup>35</sup> . . . 'no matter how directly, as being approached and claimed, as perceiving and receiving, the artist experiences his dealings with the idea which he faces and which waits embodiment, so long as he is engaged in his work spirit goes out from him and does not enter him, he replies to the world, but he does not meet it any more. Nor can he foster mutuality with his work: even in the legend Pygmalion is an ironical figure.'<sup>36</sup>

But this description does not fit the terms of our definitions, which show creation to be at nearly all points a meeting of man's solitary psyche with the reality of life outside him. He is meeting the world all the time. Buber need not assume, as he does, that an education based upon 'the training of the instinct of origination' would result in a painful 'new human solitariness'.<sup>37</sup> This seems to me to infer a very limited conception of society. Some modern art expressing neurotic trends might support his fears. The neurotic is nearly always a lonely person. But sociability, in the final sense, is coming to terms with one's environment, and this is how we have defined expression.<sup>38</sup>

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We have been considering throughout this book one narrow channel of expression, the English lesson. We have assumed that there are many more open to children at school; but we must not conclude that the theories set forth here will also apply to those; for medium does itself modify to some extent the laws of expression. We have done little more here than watch a few small craft sail up the narrow stream with varying degrees of control and felicity. Our purpose has been to know their purpose: our study to discover their skill in manoeuvre.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Chapter Thirteen, p. 159.



## APPENDIX I

### MATERIAL FROM POETS AND CRITICS USED IN THE ARGUMENTS OF THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS

No. 1. Imagination as a synthetic power. From *Biographia Literaria*, by S. T. Coleridge, Chapter XIV.<sup>1</sup> (Referred to in Chapters Eight, Ten, Eleven, Twelve, Thirteen and Fourteen.)

The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of Imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, *controul* (*laxis effertur habenis*) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonises the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

No. 2. The Suggestive Power of Great Literature. Letter from John Keats to John Hamilton Reynolds. From *Letters*, 19 Feb., 1818.<sup>2</sup> (Referred to in Chapters Nine, Eleven and Thirteen.)

MY DEAR REYNOLDS,

I had an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner—let him on a certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it, until it becomes stale—but when will it do so? Never. When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting-post

<sup>1</sup> Text from the Oxford edition, edited by J. Shawcross, Vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Text from *The Letters of John Keats*, edited by Maurice Buxton Forman. Oxford, 1947, pp. 102-104.

towards all 'the two-and-thirty Palaces'. How happy is such a voyage of conception, what delicious diligent Indolence! A doze upon a sofa does not hinder it, and a nap upon Clover engenders ethereal finger-pointings—the prattle of a child gives it wings, and the converse of middle-age strength to beat them—a strain of music conducts to 'an odd angle of the Isle', and when the leaves whisper it puts a girdle round the earth. Nor will this sparing touch of noble Books be any irreverence to their Writers—for perhaps the honours paid by Man to Man are trifles in comparison to the Benefit done by great Works to the Spirit and pulse of good by their mere passive existence. Memory should not be called knowledge. Many have original minds who do not think it—they are led away by Custom. Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel—the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering, of distinctness for his luxury. But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions. It is however quite the contrary. Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points and at last greet each other at the journey's end. An old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his path and the child left thinking. Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour and thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from the mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees. It has been an old comparison for our urging on—the Beehive; however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee—for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving—no, the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits. The flower, I doubt not, receives a fair guerdon from the Bee—its leaves blush deeper the next spring—and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury—let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be aimed at, but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive—budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with a visit—sap will be given us for meat and dew for drink. I was led into these thoughts, my dear Reynolds, by the beauty of the morning operating

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on a sense of Idleness. I have not read any Books—the Morning said I was right—I had no idea but of the morning, and the thrush said I was right.

No. 3. 'Snake', by D. H. Lawrence. From *The Ship of Death and other Poems*.<sup>3</sup> (Referred to in Chapters Nine and Eleven.)

A snake came to my water-trough  
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree  
I came down the steps with my pitcher  
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough  
before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the  
edge of the stone trough  
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,  
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness  
He sipped with his straight mouth,  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,  
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,  
And I, like a second comer, waiting.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,  
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a  
moment,  
And stooped and drank a little more,  
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the  
earth  
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The voice of my education said to me  
He must be killed,  
For in Sicily, the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are  
venomous.

And voices in me said, If you were a man  
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.

<sup>3</sup> Faber and Faber, No. 15, p. 46.

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But must I confess how I liked him,  
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my  
water-trough  
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,  
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?  
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?  
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?  
I felt so honoured.

And yet those voices:  
*If you were not afraid, you would kill him!*

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,  
But even so, honoured still more  
That he should seek my hospitality  
From out the dark door of the secret earth.

He drank enough  
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,  
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air so black,  
Seeming to lick his lips,  
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,  
And slowly turned his head,  
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,  
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round  
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,  
And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders and entered  
further,  
A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that  
horrid black hole,  
Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself  
after,  
Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,  
I picked up a clumsy log  
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,  
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in  
undignified haste,  
Writhed like lightning, and was gone  
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,  
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.  
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!  
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.  
And I thought of the albatross,  
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,  
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,  
Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords  
Of life.  
And I have something to expiate;  
A pettiness.

*Taormina*

No. 4. Symbolism and Metaphor. Perdita's flower-giving.  
From *The Winter's Tale*, by Shakespeare.<sup>4</sup> Act IV,  
Scene 3. (Referred to in Chapter Nine.)

PERDITA:                                Here's flowers for you;  
Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram;  
The marigold, that goes to bed wi' the sun,  
And with him rises weeping: these are flowers  
Of middle summer, and, I think, they are given  
To men of middle age. You're very welcome.

CAMILLO:                                I should leave grazing, were I of your flock,  
And only live by gazing.

PERDITA:                                Out alas!  
You'd be so lean, that blasts of January  
Would blow you through and through.—Now, my fair'st  
friend  
I would I had some flowers o' the spring that might  
Become your time of day; and yours, and yours,  
That wear upon your virgin branches yet  
Your maidenheads growing: O Proserpina!  
For the flowers now that frighted thou let'st fall  
From Dis's waggon! daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,  
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,  
Or Cytherea's breath; pale prime-roses,  
That die unmarried ere they can behold

<sup>4</sup> Text from the Oxford Shakespeare—*The Comedies of Shakespeare*,  
p 1044, ll. 103–132.

## APPENDIX I

Bright Phoebus in his strength,—a malady  
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips and  
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,  
The flower-de-luce being one. O! these I lack.  
To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend,  
To strew him o'er and o'er.

**FLORIZEL:** What! like a corse?

PERDITA :

No, like a bank for love to lie and play on;  
Not like a corse; or if,—not to be buried,  
But quick, and in mine arms.—Come, take your flowers:

APPENDIX II

FREE VERSE COMPOSITION IN A LONDON GIRLS'  
PRIMARY SCHOOL

I suggested to one of my students in training during a school practice that she should attempt free verse composition with her class of eight- to nine-year-olds. I gave her a rough idea of how she might proceed, indicating the application of the method of action in non-action. Her own account follows with a small selection of poems which resulted from this lesson. Another student, practising in the class below of the same school, was inspired to follow her lead. Her remarks and four poems from her group are also given here.<sup>1</sup>

I. FIRST STUDENT'S ACCOUNT

My tutor suggested that I should ask my class to write some poetry. I did not prepare the lesson in any way. I only knew that I wanted the children to write and I had no idea how to make them want to.

While the register was being called before my lesson, I glanced idly<sup>2</sup> through 'Common Sense English Course' and found a poem on Spring. I gave them the page and they read the poem to themselves. After a while I asked what it about, and they told me. I then told them to close their books and forget all about Spring, because we had not got there yet. In what season were we? Autumn—Winter? These two I wrote up and the majority said it was not yet winter. We then discussed autumn weather. The day was dull and foggy, but the day before had been a lovely one. I reminded them that yesterday was autumn, too; could they think of words to describe that day; or any sentences?

The following is a list of some of the things we discovered :

sunny	branches bending over
mist	fair and warm
cold	whirly wind
black bare trees	bright-coloured leaves
rippy waves on the pond	fresh breeze
red, green, brown, yellow	
leaves fluttering to the ground	white light clouds
the flowers are dying	
willow tree touching the water lightly	
gold.	

<sup>1</sup> Neither of the classes had done any work of this kind before.

<sup>2</sup> It was 'a diligent indolence', however. (Tutor's footnote.)

Everything I was given I accepted and wrote up on the board, until at last I thought I had enough. I then read through the list and suggested that there was enough material there for many poems. I then gave out the paper and asked them to see what they could do.

One or two set to work immediately, but the majority cried that they could not make things rhyme. I told them that rhyme was not necessary, because some poems rhymed while others did not. To every query on form I answered that they could do as they wished. They were given complete freedom to write. I do not want to give the impression that there were no exceptions. Three or four children out of the thirty-five produced nothing at all.

At a later date my tutor came in and suggested that I gave another lesson of the same type. Actually we shared it. The results were not as satisfactory as in the first instance, and for that I consider myself responsible, because I was not prepared *in my mind* for the lesson and it therefore lost its spontaneity and the feeling of the first lesson that we were discovering and making something together. This second lesson did give something that the first had not. One child, who would never do anything at all in any lesson, did in the last few minutes write this line, 'Edgar, Hugo, Mary and John, went for a walk one day'.<sup>3</sup>

*Four Autumn poems written in this lesson*<sup>4</sup>

#### I. AUTUMN

It was sunny and cold  
And the leaves are old  
The birds are flying  
And the flowers are dying  
And the sun sinks in the west  
All the little birds fly home to there nest.

And there was a faint little breeze.  
And the leaves on the trees  
Whistle as the wind goes by  
And the leaves said to each other.  
We are going to dye.

And the branch of the willow  
Hangs light in the watter  
The little birds are singing  
And the the leaves are ringing  
And the branches are shaking  
And the flowen are waking.

<sup>3</sup> These were, she said, the names of her sister and brothers. (Tutor's footnote.)

<sup>4</sup> These are printed exactly as written. (Tutor's footnote.)



## THE EDUCATION OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

### 2. AUTUMN

In Autumn the wind whirls round  
The branches bend low  
The grass is gold.  
But the children do not play  
For it is cold  
But it is yet day.

### 3. AN AUTUMN DAY

The leaves are most wonderful  
The leaves are changing gold  
The water is rippling softly  
The water is fairly cold

The Trees are nearly black  
The Trees are nearly bare  
The flowers are dying  
The sky is fair.

The birds are flying home to their nests  
The birds are flying home again  
There mother going home to  
With there little ones under her breast

The leaves are falling  
The leaves are yellow  
The leaves are black  
Like the old willow

### 4. AN AUTUMN POEM

I like it when Autumn come's  
It thrills me through and through  
The branches turn to green or brown  
Just like they ought to do.

## II. SECOND STUDENT'S ACCOUNT

I took this lesson because I was surprised at and interested in the results of Miss F.'s lesson.

It was a cold November day and I began by asking the children what words described winter. They produced several. One or two suggested words about Christmas and the others quickly followed suit. Then I asked them if they could make up poems about winter or Christmas. They were certain they could not. I said the poems

## APPENDIX II

need not rhyme. They started without enthusiasm, but after I had praised one or two, they became very keen. (In fact they often asked me later, whether they could make up poetry again.)

The words were written on the blackboard. The children were worried about spelling but I told them it did not matter (with their help I was able to decipher all they wrote).<sup>5</sup> There were about forty children in the class. ('A' stream.)

### 1. THE ROOM

In a house  
There was a room  
It was painted gold and silver  
It vanished  
Right away  
When I went in it.  
It did it  
So long  
That there was nothing left of it.

### 2. THE WIND<sup>6</sup>

When I am snugged up in bed  
I hear the wind  
It clatters on the window pane.

Sometimes when I am snugged up in bed  
I wonder what it is  
It sometimes sounds like a ghost  
And I think it barks  
I am frightened of it.

### 3. WINTER<sup>7</sup>

It is very rainy in Winter  
And the birds fly away in Winter.  
The sparrow stays with us all through the Winter.  
When the snow comes I put on my skates  
And I go skating with my skates on.  
When Christmas comes I begin to buy presents  
For me and my sister and my brothers.

<sup>5</sup> The student has corrected the spelling and in numbers 2-4 she has arranged the lines; they were written as prose. No words are altered.

<sup>6</sup> This writer was Welsh and was the most enthusiastic child. Her English work was very imaginative but her spelling was atrocious. (Student's note.)

<sup>7</sup> This child was regarded as backward by the class teacher. Her English composition seldom comprised more than two or three lines. (Student's note.)

4. AUTUMN<sup>8</sup>

Autumn is here  
And the leaves are on the ground  
We have jolly fun playing in the leaves  
And throwing them about  
We play when we have holidays  
And that's jolly fun  
I like playing in the leaves  
I think it's jolly fun.

III. TUTOR'S COMMENTS

The differences in form and content of these two groups of poems are very marked. They present a fairly representative sampling of the good and not so good of the whole output. I have included numbers three and four because they show the unimaginative level which the dullest and brightest judged on their general work can reach in expression of this kind.

What is most striking is the difference in the poetic quality of the best of both groups. Rhyme is much more freely used in group one, whilst phantasy is more marked in group two. The poems of the latter group are more individualised, there is less use of a common stock of words, the titles are more varied but the poetic level is not so high. I think the differences are due chiefly to three factors. First, the age difference shows itself. The younger group uses phantasy more readily, and there is on the whole a stronger unconscious element. The older group on the other hand illustrates the emergence of the realistic stage of early childhood<sup>9</sup>; specially noteworthy is the moralistic line, 'Just like they ought to do'. The second point of difference lies in the fact that the first student had used a poem from the children's anthologies in the touchstone spirit of Keats' letter.<sup>10</sup> That they were allowed to forget what they had read is of course important. This freed them to be influenced by it indirectly, and therefore creatively.

The third factor is the most significant: the two students came to the lesson differently prepared emotionally and temperamentally. The first student is much more strongly identified with the lesson. There is an infective spirit here lacking in the second group. The children are soaking up a kind of poetic atmosphere and giving back something in their excitement

<sup>8</sup> This child was considered the brightest in the class. (Student's note.)

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Eight, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Nine, p. 95.

almost unawares. It is possible that this student was over-identified with the lesson, and thereby lost in the expression variety and a certain amount of individuality. The second one was perhaps under-identified. She reached in some cases the children's fears and wishes but she did not gain as much poetic fervour. This is a very clear illustration of my point that the teacher in any lesson of this kind is an integral part of it<sup>11</sup>; for although the age factor is operative here, I cannot think that this one year's difference could account for the sharp contrast presented by the two groups as a whole.

The first student has understood, however, what she did in a very interesting way. In accounting for the failure of her second lesson she does not mention the interference of my presence. No creative lesson of this kind can take place satisfactorily when another adult is in the room—authority is divided and relationship disturbed. But she says that in the second lesson she was 'not prepared in mind', and here she has touched the spring which leads into much of the argument of this book. She did not know *what* she was going to do, nor even *how* she was going to do it. She had not prepared her first lesson but *she was prepared for it*, two very different things. She had *refreshed* her mind ready (note the full force of that word here), was resilient, ready to move in any direction. In other words, Schiller's 'point of nullity' had been reached. She was in an *aesthetic* state of mind.<sup>12</sup>

This 'infective' factor is an important one in a classroom. For just as we saw in Section One that children writing their plays all contributed through their creative energies, which spread like a flame, to the best lines and phrases of other children,<sup>13</sup> so here a kind of 'spontaneous overflow' of feeling and idea which may only have reached commonplace expression in some, has nevertheless made possible the finer essences of others. The sap rises in the veins throughout the whole class, but may only flower in a few instances, as it does for example in

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Eleven.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Thirteen, pp. 153, 154.

Note also in this context another passage from Schiller: 'this state of absence of determination can be named an empty infiniteness which must not by any means be confounded with an infinite void'. *Op. cit.*, p. 80 (Letter XIX.) To avoid the danger of this latter state students in training are expected to write lesson notes; but let it be observed that no lesson notes can forecast 'the empty infiniteness' of the other kind of lesson.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 42 ff.

the lovely second verse of the first Autumn poem ; and children with that curious possessive generosity of theirs acclaim the winner but take the prize as partly their own. 'Our class' can mean to the young child 'me'. Notice too, how the common stock of phrasing is tossed about in the jingling lines of the first three verses of number three, *An Autumn Day*; and then how suddenly in the last verse form emerges, the artist comes into being and the lovely fourth verse lifts its head like a water lily rising from its heavy undergrowth.

Lessons like this of course cannot be repeated too often—can never be repeated without fresh inspiration (re-freshment) and new methods of approach. Otherwise a staleness and self-consciousness would set in, and false griffins would begin to appear.

The effect of such work as this on the teacher should not go unmentioned. The day following the first lesson, the student rushed into my room with a handful of papers and exclaimed: 'I am so excited, children are poets, and I never believed it'. In these lessons it is not only the children who are left more creative than they were before, the teachers are enduringly richer because of them.

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